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THE

SUNDAY LIBRARY;

OR,

THE PROTESTANT'S MANUAL FOR THE SABBATH-DAY:

BEING A SELECTION OF

SERMONS FROM EMINENT DIVINES

OF

The Church of England,

CHIEFLY WITHIN THE LAST HALF CENTURY;

WITH OCCASIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES AND NOTES.

BY THE REV. T. F. DIBDIN, D. D.

RECTOR OF ST. MARY'S, BRYANSTON SQUARE; AND VICAR OF EXNING, SUFFOLK.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

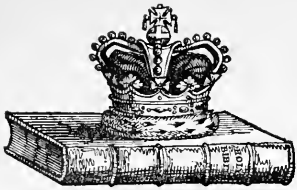
PRINTED FOR

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMAN,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1832.

22422.1
No. 2. 36.



HONOUR ALL MEN: LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD: FEAR GOD: HONOUR THE KING.

1 Pet. ii. 17.

ADVERTISEMENT.

In reply to numerous enquiries which have been made respecting the *probable extent* of the Sunday Library (as connected with a Collection of Sermons), it may be proper to observe, that it is not the present intention of the Editor to extend it beyond six volumes; presuming that, within such limits, he may concentrate a body of useful and instructive divinity, exhibiting the main points and essential articles of the Christian faith, arrayed in language the most pure, and enforced by arguments the most cogent.

The Editor trusts that the present Volume, in which the Sermons, although somewhat shortened in *number*, are lengthened in *matter*, will be found

worthy of those which have preceded it. For learned and successful research, and happy and powerful illustration, those of the late Professor White and of the present Bishop of Durham deserve peculiar notice and commendation. The remaining Discourses appertain more particularly to *practical* points of Christianity; and it is presumed that few who peruse them with seriousness of intention, will not be substantially benefited by their perusal. The Editor feels unfeigned delight in the declaration, that the SUNDAY LIBRARY gathers strength while it attracts notice. His thanks to the several Authors and Publishers who have allowed the re-impression of these Discourses, continue undiminished in gratefulness of feeling.

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SAMUEL HORSLEY, D.D.

LATE BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

From an edition of his Sermons, published in 1829, 8vo. 2 volumes: from which the specimens in the preceding Volume of this Work were selected. That, immediately following, is considered among the most distinguished and happiest efforts of its Author. Consult the Introductory Note, Vol. I. p. 205.

THE SYROPHŒNICIAN WOMAN.

MARK, vii. 26.

The woman was a Greek, a Syrophœnician by nation.

THE maxim of our great moral poet, that the preponderance of some leading passion in the original constitution of every man's mind is that which gives the character of every individual its peculiar cast and fashion, influencing him in the choice of his profession, in the formation of his affinities and friendships, colouring both his virtues and his vices, and discovering its constant energy in the least as well as the more important actions of his life, — that the variety of this predominant principle in various men, is the source of that infinite diversity in the inclinations and pursuits of men, which so admirably corresponds with the variety of conditions and employments in social life, and is the means which the wise Author of our nature hath contrived to connect the enjoyment of the individual with the general good, to lessen the evils which would arise to the public from the vices of the individual, and enhance the benefits accruing from his virtues; — the truth of this principle is confirmed, I believe, to

every man who ever thinks upon the subject, by his own experience of what passes within himself, and by his observation of what is passing in the world around him. As our blessed Lord was in all things made like unto his brethren, it will be no violation of the respect which is due to the dignity of his person, if, in order to form the better judgment of the transcendent worth and excellence of his character in the condition of a man, we apply the same principles in the study of his singular life which we should employ to analyse the conduct of a mere mortal. And if we take this method, and endeavour to refer the particulars of his conduct, in the various situations in which we find him represented by the historians of his life, to some one principle, we cannot but perceive, that the desire of accomplishing the great purpose for which he came into the world was in him what the ruling passion is in other men.

Two things were to be done for the deliverance of fallen man from the consequences of his guilt: the punishment of sin was to be bought off by the Redeemer's sufferings, who is therefore said to have bought us with a price; and the manners of men were to be reformed by suitable instruction. From the first commencement of our Lord's public ministry, — perhaps from a much earlier period, — the business on which he came had so entirely taken possession of his mind, that he seems in no situation to have lost sight of it for a moment. On the contrary, it was the end to which every action

of his life was, not so much by study, as by the spontaneous habit of his mind, adjusted. In the greater actions of his life, we find him always pursuing the conduct which might be the most likely to bring on that tragical catastrophe which the scheme of atonement demanded, and studious to prevent every obstacle that might be thrown in the way of the event, either by the zeal of his friends or the malice of his enemies. He works a miracle, at one time, to avoid being made a king; at another, to secure himself from the fury of a rabble. The acceptance of an earthly kingdom had been inconsistent with the establishment of his everlasting monarchy; and he declined the danger of popular tumult and private assassination, that he might die in the character of a criminal by a judiciary process and a public execution. When by this management things were brought to the intended crisis, and his imagination shrunk from the near prospect of ignominy and pain, the wish that he might be saved from the approaching hour was overpowered by the reflection, that "for this hour he came into the world." Before the Jewish Sanhedrim and the Roman governor he maintained a conduct which seemed to invite his doom: before the Sanhedrim, he employed a language by which he knew he should incur the charge of blasphemy; and at Pilate's tribunal he refused to plead "not guilty" to the false accusation of treason.

As the more deliberate actions of our Saviour's life were thus uniformly directed to the accomplish-

ment of man's redemption, at the time and in the manner which the prophets had foretold; so, in what may be called the ordinary occurrences of life, we find his whole conduct shaped and determined by a constant attention to the second branch of the great business upon which he came, the reformation of mankind. In every incidental situation, something peculiarly characteristic is discernible in his actions, by which they were marked as it were for his own, and distinguished from the actions of ordinary men in similar circumstances; and all these characteristic peculiarities of his conduct will be found, if I mistake not, when narrowly examined, to convey some important lesson in morals or religion, first to his immediate followers, and ultimately to all mankind. Hence it is that his actions, upon every occasion, as they are recorded by his evangelists, are no less instructive than his solemn discourses. I speak not now of the instruction conveyed by the general good example of his holy life, or in particular actions done upon certain occasions, for the express purpose of enforcing particular precepts by the authority of his example, but of particular lessons to be drawn from the peculiar manner of his conduct, upon those common occasions of action which occur in every man's daily life, when the manner of the thing done or spoken seems less to proceed from a deliberate purpose of the will than from the habitual predominance of the ruling principle. It is true, in our Saviour's life nothing was common; his actions, at least, were in some

measure always extraordinary: but yet his extraordinary life was so far analogous to the common life of men, that he had frequent occasions of action arising from the incidents of life and from external circumstances. The study of his conduct upon these occasions is the most useful speculation, for practical improvement, in which a Christian can engage.

The words of my text stand in the beginning of the narrative of a very extraordinary transaction; which, for the useful lessons it contains, is related in detail by two of the evangelists. It is my intention to review the particulars of the story; and point out to you, as I proceed, the instruction which the mention of each circumstance seems intended to convey.

It was in the commencement, as I think, of the last year of his ministry, that our Lord, either for security from the malice of his enemies, the Pharisees (whose resentment he had excited by a recent provocation—a discovery to the people of the disguised avarice of the sect, and a public assertion of the insignificance of their religious forms), or perhaps that he found his popularity in Galilee rising to a height inconsistent with his own views and with the public tranquillity,—thought proper to retire for a season to a country where his person was little known, although his fame, as appears by the event, had reached it—the border of the Sidonian territory. The inhabitants of this region were a mixed people, partly Jews, partly the progeny of those Canaanites who were suffered to remain in these extreme parts

when the children of Israel took possession of the promised land. On his journey to the destined place of his retirement, he was met by a woman, who with loud cries and earnest entreaties implored his aid in behalf of her young daughter, possessed by an evil spirit.

The first circumstance in this story which engages our attention, is the description of the woman which is given in my text. This requires a particular explication, because it is the key to much of the mystery of our Lord's conduct upon the occasion. "The woman was a Greek, a Syrophœnician by nation." She was by nation, therefore, not a Jewess; she was not of the family of the Israelites, and had no claim to the privileges of the chosen people. But that is not all; she was by nation "a Syrophœnician." The Phœnicians were a race scattered over the whole world in numerous colonies. The different settlements were distinguished by names taken from the countries upon which they bordered. The Canaanites were one of these Phœnician colonies; and because they bordered upon Syria, they were called by the Greeks and Romans Syro-Phœnicians. A Syrophœnician, therefore, is a Canaanite under another name: the woman, therefore, who came out to meet our Lord was not only an alien from the stock of Israel — she was a daughter of the accursed Canaan; she came of that impure and impious stock, which the Israelites, when they settled in Palestine, were commissioned and commanded to exterminate. Particular persons, it

is true, at that time found means to obtain an exemption of themselves and their families from the general sentence, — as Rahab the hostess, by her kind entertainment of the Jewish spies; and the whole city of the Gibeonites, by a surrender of themselves and their posterity for ever to a personal servitude. But such families, if they embraced not the Jewish religion in all its forms, at least renounced idolatry; for the Israelites were not at liberty to spare their lives, and to suffer them to remain within the limits of the Holy Land, upon any other terms. Our Lord's suppliant was not of any of these reformed families; for she was not only "a Syrophœnician by nation," she was besides "a Greek." She was a "Greek." This word describes not her country, but her religion: she was an idolatress, bred in the principles of that gross idolatry which consisted in the worship of the images of dead men. And because idolatry in this worst form obtained more among the Greeks than the nations of the East, such idolaters, of whatever country they might be, were by the Jews of the apostolic age called Greeks; just as, among us, any one who lives in the communion of the Roman church, though he be a Frenchman or a Spaniard, is called a Roman Catholic.

We now, then, understand what the woman was who sought our Lord's assistance, — by birth a Canaanite, by profession an idolatress. It appears by the sequel of the story, (for to understand the parts, we must keep the whole in view; and we

must anticipate the end, to make the true use of the beginning,)—it appears, I say, from the sequel of the story, that, whatever the errors of her former life had been, when she came to implore our Lord's compassion she had overcome the prejudices of her education, and had acquired notions of the true God and his perfections which might have done honour to a Jew by profession, a native Israelite. To this happy change the calamity with which she was visited in the person of her child had no doubt conduced: and to this end it was, perhaps, more conducive than any thing she could have suffered in her own person; because her distress for her child was purely mental, and mental distress is a better corrective of the mind than bodily disease or infirmity, —because, equally repressive of the levity of the mind and the wanderings of the imagination to pleasurable objects, it is not attended with that disturbance and distraction of the thoughts which are apt to be produced by the pain and debility of sickness. Thus we see how God remembers mercy even in his judgments; administering afflictions in the way in which they most conduce to the sufferer's benefit. Nor can it be deemed an injury to the child that it was subjected to sufferings for another's guilt; since the innocence of its own future life might be best secured by the mother's reformation.

Conscious of the change that was already wrought in her sentiments and principles, and resolved no doubt upon a suitable reformation of her conduct, the converted idolatress of the Syrophœnician race

would not be discouraged, either by the curse entailed upon her family, or by the remembrance of the guilt and error of her past life, from trying the success of a personal application to our Lord. She well understood that no individual, of any nation or family, could without personal guilt be excluded from God's love and mercy, by virtue of any curse entailed upon the race in its political or collective capacity. Reasons of government in God's moral kingdom may make it expedient and even necessary, that the progeny of any eminent delinquent should for many generations, perhaps for the whole period of their existence upon earth as a distinct family, be the worse for the crimes of their progenitor. God, therefore, may, and he certainly does, visit the sins of the fathers upon the children collectively for many generations; as at this day he visits on the Jews collectively the infidelity of their forefathers in the age of our Lord and his apostles. But these visitations are in truth acts of mercy; and, rightly understood, they are signs of favour to the persons visited. They are intended not only for the general admonition of mankind, but for the particular benefit of those on whom the evil is inflicted; who are taught by it to abhor and dread the crime which hath been the source of their calamity. These curses, therefore, on a family hinder not but that every individual of the race holds the same place in God's favour or displeasure as had been due to his good or ill deservings had the public malediction never been incurred. It is true, the innocence of an individual

may not procure him an exemption from his share of the public evil; but this is because it is for his advantage in the end that he be not exempted. "If I am of the race of Canaan," said our Syrophœnician woman, "it is true I must take my share of certain national disadvantages which God hath been pleased to lay upon our race as lasting monuments of his abhorrence of the crime of our ancestors; but this is no reason that I trust not to his mercy for deliverance from my own particular afflictions. Nor will I be deterred by the crimes and follies of my past life. My Maker knows that the understanding which he gave me is liable to error,—that he hath formed me with passions apt to be seduced: he hath administered a correction, by which I am brought to a sense of my error; and I am, I trust, in some degree recovered from seduction; I am no longer, therefore, the object of his displeasure, but of his mercy; of which my providential recovery from sin and ignorance, though effected by a bitter discipline, is itself a proof. He hath already shown me his mercy in the very affliction which hath wrought my reformation. I should fail, therefore, in gratitude to my benefactor, were I to indulge a timidity of imploring his assistance."

Such were the sentiments of the reformed idolatress, when she had the courage to become a suppliant to our Lord in her own person; and such should be the sentiments of every sinner, in his first efforts to turn from the power of darkness to

serve the living God. He should harbour no apprehension that his past sins will exclude him from the Divine mercy, if he can but persevere in his resolution of amendment. Nor is the perseverance doubtful, if the resolution be sincere: from the moment that the understanding is awakened to a sense of the danger and of the loathsomeness of sin — to a reverent sense of God's perfections — to a fear of his anger, as the greatest evil — to a desire of his favour, as the highest good, — from the moment that this change takes place in the sinner's heart and understanding, whatever may have been the malignity, the number, and the frequency of his past crimes, such is the efficacy of the great sacrifice, he is reconciled to God, — he obtains not only forgiveness, but assistance; and the measure of the assistance, I will be bold to say, is always in proportion to the strength of evil habit which the penitent hath to overcome. He is not, therefore, to be discouraged from addressing himself to God in prayer, by a sense of unworthiness arising from his past sins. Upon the ground of merit, no man is worthy to claim an audience of his Maker; but to a privilege to which innocence might scarce aspire, by the mercy of the Gospel covenant, repentance is admitted. Reformation, indeed, is innocence in the merciful construction of the Christian dispensation: the Redeemer stands at God's right hand, pleading in the behalf of the penitent the merit of his own humiliation; and the effect is, that no remembrance is had in heaven of forsaken sin. The courage of

our converted idolatress is an edifying example to all repenting sinners; and the blessing with which it was in the end rewarded justified the principles upon which she acted.

Before we proceed to the more interesting subject of meditation—our Saviour's conduct upon this occasion, we must consider another circumstance on the woman's part—the manner in which her supplication was addressed. She came from her home to meet him on the road; and she cried out—"Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David!" Jesus, retiring from the malice of his enemies or the imprudence of his friends to the Sidonian territory, is saluted by an idolatress of the Canaanites, by his proper titles—"the Lord," "the Son of David." It is, indeed, little to be wondered, that idolaters living on the confines of the Jewish territory, and conversing much with the Israelites, should be well acquainted with the hope which they entertained of a national deliverer to arise in David's family, at a time when the expectation of his advent was raised to the height, by the evident completion of the prophecies which marked the time of his appearance; and when the numberless miracles wrought by our Lord, in the course of three successive summers, in every part of Galilee, had made both the expectation of the Messiah, and the claim of Jesus to be the person, the talk of the whole country to a considerable distance. It is the less to be wondered, because we find something of an expectation of the Messiah of the Jews in all parts of the world at that season.

But the remarkable circumstance is this,—that this Syrophœnician idolatress must have looked for no partial deliverer of the Jewish nation, but for a general benefactor of all mankind, in the person of the Jewish Messiah; for had he been to come for the particular benefit of the Jews only, this daughter of Canaan could have had no part or interest in the Son of David.

Having examined into the character of our Lord's suppliant, and remarked the terms in which she addressed him, we will in another discourse consider the remarkable manner in which on our Lord's part her petition was received.

THE SYROPHŒNICIAN WOMAN.

MARK, vii. 26.

The woman was a Greek, a Syrophœnician by nation.

THESE words describe what was most remarkable in the character of a woman, a Canaanite by birth, an idolatress by education, who implored our Lord's miraculous assistance in behalf of her young daughter tormented with an evil spirit. In my last discourse, the lessons to be drawn from this character of the woman, and from the manner in which her petition was preferred, were distinctly pointed out. I come now to consider, still with a view to practical inferences, the manner in which, on our Lord's part, the petition was received.

In the lovely character of the blessed Jesus, there was not a more striking feature than a certain sentimental tenderness, which disposed him to take a part in every one's affliction to which he chanced to be a witness, and to be ready to afford it a miraculous relief. He was apt to be particularly touched by instances of domestic distress; in which the suffering arises from those feelings of friendship, growing out of natural affection and habitual endearment,

which constitute the perfection of man as a social creature, and distinguish the society of the human kind from the instinctive herdings of the lower animals. When at the gate of Nain he met the sad procession of a young man's funeral,—a poor widow, accompanied by her sympathising neighbours, conveying to the grave the remains of an only son, suddenly snatched from her by disease in the flower of his age,—the tenderness of his temper appeared, not only in what he did, but in the kind and ready manner of his doing it. He scrupled not to avow how much he was affected by the dismal scene: he addressed words of comfort to the weeping mother: unasked, upon the pure motion of his own compassion, he went up and touched the bier;—he commanded the spirit to return to its deserted mansion, and restored to the widow the support and comfort of her age.

The object now before him might have moved a heart less sensible than his. A miserable mother, in the highest agony of grief,—perhaps a widow, for no husband appeared to take a part in the business,—implores his compassion for her daughter, visited with the most dreadful malady to which the frail frame of sinful man was ever liable—possession. In this reasoning age, we are little agreed about the cause of the disorder to which this name belongs. If we may be guided by the letter of holy writ, it was a tyranny of hellish fiends over the imagination and the sensory of the patient. For my

own part, I find no great difficulty of believing that this was really the case. I hold those philosophising believers but weak in faith, and not strong in reason, who measure the probabilities of past events by the experience of the present age, in opposition to the evidence of the historians of the times. I am inclined to think that the power of the infernal spirits over the bodies as well as the minds of men suffered a capital abridgment, an earnest of the final putting down of Satan to be trampled under foot of men, when the Son of God had achieved his great undertaking: that, before that event, men were subject to a sensible tyranny of the hellish crew, from which they have been ever since emancipated. As much as this seems to be implied in that remarkable saying of our Lord, when the seventy returned to him expressing their joy that they had found the devils subject to themselves through his name. He said unto them—"I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Our Lord *saw* him fall from the heaven of his power: what wonder, then, that the effects should no longer be perceived of a power which he hath lost? Upon these general principles, without any particular enquiry into the subject, I am contented to rest, and exhort you all to rest, in the belief, which in the primitive church was universal, that possession really was what the name imports. Be that as it may, whatever the disorder was, its effects are undisputed,—a complication of epilepsy and madness, sometimes accompanied with a paralytic affection of one or more of the organs of the

senses; the madness, in the worst cases, of the frantic and mischievous kind.

Such was the malady in which our Lord's assistance was implored. The compassion of the case was heightened by the tender age of the miserable patient. St. Mark calls her the "young daughter" of the unhappy suppliant; an expression which indicates that she had just attained that engaging season when a winning sprightliness takes place of the insipid state of puling infancy, and the innocence of childhood is not yet corrupted by the ill example, nor its good-humour ruffled by the ill usage of the world. It might have been expected, that the slightest representation of this dismal case would have worked upon the feelings of our compassionate Lord, and that the merciful sentence would immediately have issued from his lips which should have compelled the trembling fiend to release his captive; but, strange to tell! he made as if he were unmoved by the dismal story; and, regardless of the wretched mother's cries, "he answered her not a word."

It is certain that the most benevolent of men are not equally inclined at all seasons to give attention to a stranger's concerns, or to be touched with the recital of a stranger's distress. A suppliant to our charity, whose case deserves attention, sometimes meets with a cool or with a rough reception, because he applies in an unlucky moment. Since our Lord was made like unto his brethren, may something analogous to this fretfulness, which more or less is

incident to the very best of men, be supposed in him, to account for the singularity of his conduct in this instance? Were his spirits exhausted by the fatigue of a long journey made afoot? was his mind ruffled by his late contentions with the captious Pharisees? was he wearied out by the frequency of petitions for his miraculous assistance? was he disgusted with the degeneracy of mankind in general, and with the hardened incredulity of his own nation? was his benevolence, in short, for the moment laid asleep, by a fit of temporary peevishness? God forbid that any here should harbour the injurious, the impious suspicion!—a suspicion which even the Socinians (not to charge them wrongfully) have not yet avowed, however easily it might be reconciled with their opinions. The Redeemer, though in all things like unto his brethren, was without sin: the fretfulness which is apt to be excited by external circumstances, whatever excuses particular occasions may afford, is always in some degree sinful. Benignity was the fixed and inbred habit of his holy mind; a principle not to be overcome in him, as in the most perfect of the sons of Adam, by the cross incidents of life. We must seek the motives of his present conduct in some other source, — not in any accidental sourness of the moment.

This was the first instance in which his aid had been invoked by a person neither by birth an Israelite nor by profession a worshipper of the God of Israel. The miracle which he was presently to work for the relief and at the request of this heathen suppliant

was to be an action of no small importance. It was nothing less than a prelude to the disclosure of the great mystery which had been hidden for ages, and was not openly to be revealed before Christ's ascension, — that through him the gate of mercy was opened to the Gentiles. When an action was about to be done significant of so momentous a truth, it was expedient that the attention of all who stood by should be drawn to the thing by something singular and striking in the manner of the doing of it. It was expedient that the manner of the doing of it should be such as might save the honour of the Jewish dispensation, — that it should mark the consistency of the old dispensation with the new, by circumstances which should imply, that the principle upon which mankind in general were at last received to mercy was the very same upon which the single family of the Israelites had been originally taken into favour,—namely, that mankind in general, by the light of the Gospel revelation, were at last brought to a capacity at least of that righteousness of faith which was the thing so valued in Abraham that it rendered him the friend of God, and procured him the visible and lasting reward of special blessings on his posterity. It was fit that she who was chosen to be the first example of mercy extended to a heathen should be put to some previous trial; that she might give proof of that heroic faith which acts with an increased vigour under the pressure of discouragement, and show herself in some sort worthy of so high a preference. The coldness,

therefore, with which her petition was at first received was analogous to the afflictions and disappointments with which the best servants of God are often exercised; which are intended to call forth their virtue here, and heighten their reward hereafter. It is one of the many instances preserved in Holy Writ, which teach the useful lesson of entire resignation to the will of God, under protracted affliction and accumulated disappointments, —upon this principle, that good men are never more in the favour and immediate care of God than when in the judgment of the giddy world they seem the most forgotten and forsaken by him.

Our Lord's attendants, touched with the distress of the case, — penetrated by the woman's cries, — perhaps ashamed that such an object should be openly treated with neglect (for what had hitherto passed was upon the public road), — and little entering into the motives of our Lord's conduct, took upon them to be her advocates. "They besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us." *Send her away*, — that is, grant her petition, and give her her dismissal. That must have been their meaning; for in no instance had they seen the prayer of misery rejected; nor would they have asked their Master to send her away without relief. If our Lord had his chosen attendants, — if among those attendants he had his favourites, yet in the present case the interest of a favourite could not be allowed to have any weight. He had, indeed, belied his own feelings, had he seemed to listen more to the importunities of his friends than

to the cries of distress and the pleadings of his own compassion. The interference of the disciples only served him with an occasion to prosecute his experiment of his suppliant's faith. He framed his reply to them in terms which might seem to amount to a refusal of the petition, which before he had only seemed not to regard: he said, "I am *not* sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."—Oh, miserable woman! offspring of an accursed race! cease thy unavailing prayers:—he hath pronounced thy sentence! Betake thee to thy home, sad outcast from thy Maker's love! Impatience of thy absence but aggravates thy child's distraction; nor long shall her debilitated frame support the tormentor's cruelty: give her while she lives the consolation of a parent's tenderness;—it shall somewhat cheer the melancholy of the intervals of her frenzy;—it is the only service thou canst render her. For thyself, alas! no consolation remains, but in the indulgence of despair: the Redeemer is *not* sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and to that house, ill-fated Canaanite! thou wast born, and thou hast lived a stranger!

The faith of the Syrophœnician idolatress gave way to no such suggestions of despair. It required, indeed, the sagacity of a lively faith to discern that an absolute refusal of her prayer was not contained in our Lord's discouraging declaration. In that godly sagacity she was not deficient. "He is not sent." Is he then a servant, sent upon an errand, with precise instructions for the execution of his

business, which he is not at liberty to exceed? — No: he comes with the full powers of a Son. Wise, no doubt, and just is the decree that salvation shall be of the Jews, — that the general blessing shall take its beginning in the family of Abraham, — that the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem: be it, that by disclosing the great scheme of mercy to the chosen people, he fulfils the whole of his engagement; yet though he is *sent* to none but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, no restriction is laid upon him not to receive his sheep of any other fold, if any such resort to him. What though it be my misfortune to have been born an alien from the chosen stock? what though I have no claim under any covenant or any promise? — I will hope against hope; I will cast me on his free uncovenanted mercy; I will trust to the fervour of my own prayers, to obtain what seems to be denied to the intercession of his followers.

Supported by this confidence, she followed our Lord into the house where he took up his abode: there she fell prostrate at his feet, crying, — "Lord, help me!" — O faithful daughter of an unbelieving race! great is the example which the afflicted have in thee, of an unshaken confidence in that mercy which ordereth all things for the good of them that fear God! Thy prayer is heard; help shall be given thee: but thy faith must yet endure a farther trial. By his answer to the disciples, our Lord seemed studious only to disown any obligation that the nature of his undertaking might be sup-

posed to lay upon him to attend to any but the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Stifling the emotions of his pity, and dissembling his merciful intentions, he answers the wretched suppliant at his feet as it he were upon principle disinclined to grant her request, — lest a miracle wrought in her favour should be inconsistent with the distinction due to the chosen family. "It is not meet," he said, "to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." *Children's bread; and cast to dogs!* Terrible distinction! — The Israelites children, the Gentiles dogs! The words, perhaps, in the sense which they bore in the mind of the speaker, were rather descriptive of the different situation of the Jews and the Gentiles at that time with respect to the degree of religious knowledge they had for many ages severally enjoyed, than of the different rank they held in God's favour. It is certain that God hath made of one blood all nations of men; and his tender mercy is over all his works. The benefit of the whole world was ultimately intended in the selection of the Jewish people. At the time of the call of Abraham, the degeneracy of mankind was come to that degree that the true religion could nowhere be preserved otherwise than by miracle. Miracle, perpetual miracle, was not the proper expedient for its general preservation; because it must strike the human mind with too much force to be consistent with the freedom of a moral agent. A single family, therefore, was selected, in which the truth might be preserved in a way that gene-

rally was ineligible. By this contrivance, an ineligible way was taken of doing a necessary thing (a thing necessary in the schemes of mercy); but it was used, as wisdom required it should be used, in the least possible extent. The family which for the general good was chosen to be the immediate object of this miraculous discipline enjoyed no small privilege: they enjoyed the advantages of the light of Revelation; while among the Gentiles, the light of nature itself, in what regards morals and religion, bright as it may shine in the writings of their philosophers, was to the general mass of mankind almost extinguished. It was for this advantage which the one enjoyed, and the others were allowed to want, that they might feel at length the dismal consequences of their defection from the worship of their Maker, that they are called collectively — the Jews "children," and the Gentiles "dogs." The Jew, indeed, who duly improved under the light which he enjoyed, and (not relying on his descent from Abraham, or on the merit of his ritual service,) was conscientiously attentive to the weightier matters of the law, became in another sense the child of God, as personally the object of his favour; and the Gentile who, shutting his eyes against the light of nature, gave himself up to work iniquity with greediness, became in another sense a dog, as personally the object of God's aversion; and it is ever to be remembered, that in this worst sense the greater part of the Gentile world were dogs, and lived in enmity with God: but still no Jew was

individually a child, nor any Gentile individually a dog, as a Jew or a Gentile, but as a good or a bad man, or as certain qualities morally good or evil were included in the notion of a Jew or a Gentile.

But how great was that faith, which, when the great mystery was not yet disclosed—when God's secret purpose of a general redemption had not yet been opened, was not startled at the sound of this dreadful distinction,—the Israelites, children; the Gentiles, dogs! How great was the faith which was displayed in the humility and in the firmness of the woman's reply! She said,—"Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

First, observe her humility,—her submission to the arrangements of unerring wisdom and justice. She admits the distinction, so unfavourable as it might seem to her own expectations, so mortifying as it unquestionably was to her pride; she says,—"Truth, Lord; I must confess the reality of the distinction which thou allegest: thy nation are the children; we are dogs!" She admits not only the reality, but the propriety of the distinction; she presumes not to question the equity and justice of it; she says not,—"Since God has made of one blood all nations of men, why should a single family be his favourites, and the whole world beside outcasts?" She reposes in a general persuasion of God's wisdom and goodness; she takes it for granted that a distinction which proceeded from him must be founded in wisdom, justice, and benevolence,—that, how-

ever concealed the end of it might be, it must be in some way conducive to the universal good — that it ought, therefore, to be submitted to with cheerfulness, even by those on whose side the disadvantage for the present lay. Would God, that men would imitate the humility of this pious Canaanite; that they would consider the scanty measure of the human intellect; rest satisfied in the general belief of the Divine goodness and wisdom; and wait for the event of things, to clear up the things "hard to be understood" in the present constitution of the moral world as well as in the Bible!

We have seen the humility of the Syrophœnician suppliant; let us next consider her firmness. Hitherto she had prayed;—her prayers meet with no encouragement: she ventures now to argue. The principles and frame of her argument are very extraordinary: she argues, from God's general care of the world, against the inference of neglect in particular instances;—such was the confidence of her faith in God's goodness, that she argues from that general principle of her belief against the show of severity in her own case: she seems to say,— "Though thou slay me, yet will I trust in thee; I will rely on thy general attribute of mercy, against what, to one less persuaded of thy goodness, might seem the tenour of thine own words and the sense of thy present conduct." Nor were the grounds of her argument less extraordinary than the drift of it; she avails herself of the distinction which our Lord had himself alleged, as it should seem, in bar of her

petition, to establish a claim upon his mercy. This expostulation of the Syrophœnician woman with our Lord hath no parallel in the whole compass of the sacred history, except it be in Abraham's pleadings with the Almighty upon the case of righteous men involved in national calamities. "It is true," she said, "O Lord! I am not thy child,—I am a dog; but that's the worst of my condition—I still am thine,—I am appointed to a certain use,—I bear a certain relation, though no high one, in the family of the universal Lord. The dogs, though not children, have, however, their proper share in the care and kindness of the good man of the house: they are not regaled with the first and choicest of the food provided for the children's nourishment; but they are never suffered to be famished with hunger,—they are often fed by the master's hand with the fragments of his own table. Am I a dog? —It is well: I murmur not at the preference justly shown to the dearer and the worthier children: give me but my portion of the scraps and offal."

O rare example, in a heathen, of resignation to the will of God,—of complacency and satisfaction in the general arrangements of his providence, which he is the best Christian who best imitates! The faithful Canaanite thankfully accepts what God is pleased to give, because he gives it: she is contented to fill the place which he assigns to her, because he assigns it; and repines not that another fills a higher station: she is contented to be what God ordains,—to receive what he bestows, in the

pious persuasion that every one is "fed with the food that is convenient for him," — that every being endued with sense and reason is placed in the condition suited to his natural endowments, and furnished with means of happiness fitly proportioned to his capacities of enjoyment.

We have yet another circumstance to remark in our Syrophœnician's faith; which is less, indeed, a part of its merit than of the blessing which attended it; but it is extraordinary, and deserves notice. I speak of the quick discernment and penetration which she discovers in religious subjects, and that, too, upon certain points upon which even now, in the full sunshine of the Gospel, it is easy for the unwary to go wrong, and at that time it was hardly to be expected that the wisest should form a right judgment. Surely with truth the prophet said, "The secret of the Lord is among them that fear him." Whence, but from that secret illumination which is the blessing of the pure in heart in every clime and every age, could this daughter of the Canaanites have drawn her information, that among the various benefits which the Redeemer came to bestow upon the children of God's love, the mercy which she solicited was but of a secondary value? She ventures to ask for it as no part of the children's food, but a portion only of the crumbs which fell from their richly furnished table. We are apt to imagine that the Christians of the first age, among whom our Lord and the apostles lived and worked their miracles, were objects of a

partial favour not equally extended to believers in these later ages: and it must be confessed their privilege was great, to receive counsel and instruction from the first source of life and knowledge, and from the lips of his inspired messengers; but it was a privilege, in the nature of the thing, confined to a certain time, and, like all temporary privileges, conferred on a few for the general good: the clear knowledge of our duty, — the promise of immortal life to the obedient, — the expiation of our sins by a sufficient meritorious sacrifice, — the pardon secured to the penitent by that atonement, — the assistance promised to the well disposed, — in a word, the full remission of our sins, and the other benefits of our Saviour's life and death, of his doctrine and example, — these things are the bread which Christ brought down from heaven for the nourishment of the faithful; — in these benefits believers in all ages are equal sharers with the first converts, our Lord's own contemporaries, provided they be equally good Christians. The particular benefits which the first Christians received from the miraculous powers, in the cure of their diseases and the occasional relief of their worldly afflictions, and even in the power of performing those cures and of giving that relief, — these things in themselves, without respect to their use in promoting the salvation of men by the propagation of the Gospel, were, as we are taught by our Syrophœnician sister, but the fragments and the refuse of the bridegroom's supper.

We have now traced the motives of our Lord's unusual but merciful austerity in the first reception of his suppliant. What wonder that so bright an example of an active faith was put to a trial which might render it conspicuous? It had been injustice to the merit of the character to suffer it to lie concealed. What wonder, when this faith was tried to the uttermost, that our merciful Lord should condescend to pronounce its encomium, and crown it with a peculiar blessing? — "O woman! great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed." The mercy shown to this deserving woman, by the edification which is conveyed in the manner in which the favour was conferred, was rendered a blessing to the whole church; inasmuch as it was the seal of the merit of the righteousness of faith, — not of "faith separable from good works," consisting in a mere assent to facts; but of that faith which is the root of every good work, — of that faith which consists in a trust in God, and a reliance on his mercy, founded on a just sense of his perfections. It was a seal of the acceptance of the penitent, and of the efficacy of their prayers; and a seal of this important truth, that the afflictions of the righteous are certain signs of God's favour, — the more certain in proportion as they are more severe. Whenever, therefore, the memory of this fact occurs, let every heart and every tongue join in praise and thanksgiving to the merciful Lord, for the cure of the young demoniac on the

Tyrian border; and never be the circumstance forgotten which gives life and spirit to the great moral of the story,—that the mother, whose prayers and faith obtained the blessing, "was a Greek, a Syrophœnician by nation."

WILLIAM VAN MILDERT, D. D.

BISHOP OF DURHAM.

From "A Series of Sermons, preached for the Lecture founded by the Hon. Robert Boyle, in the Parish Church of Mary-le-bow, London."

A new edition of this valuable performance (from which the two ensuing Sermons are selected) has just made its appearance; and I take this opportunity to offer the very humble, but very hearty, testimony of my conviction of its paramount importance in the library of every Christian, clergyman or layman, who has had the advantage of a scholastic education.

THE INABILITY OF MAN TO FRAME A RELIGION FOR HIMSELF.

1 Cor. iii. 11.

Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

To attempt the construction of an edifice, without first laying a firm and solid foundation;—to infer conclusions as certain, without previous assurance of the truth of the premises;—or to advance theorems in science, without axioms or data to support them;—would be justly considered as sure indications of ignorance, perverseness, or a disordered understanding. Yet similar to these absurdities is that of the infidel, who endeavours to devise a religion of his own without the aid of Revelation. This seems to be intimated by St. Paul, when, in censuring the *heretical* teachers of his day, he affirms (what is equally conclusive against *all* who would impose upon us religious systems of their own invention), "other *foundation* can no man lay than that *is* laid, which is Jesus Christ;"—implying, that when men disregard the *revealed* will of God, they are unable to frame any consistent scheme of religion, for want

of *foundation;* that is, for want of sure and solid *principles*, on which to ground their opinions.

This fundamental defect in all endeavours to attain to religious knowledge without help from above, demands particular consideration; since it tends most effectually to prove the insecure and hazardous nature of those systems, which men have had the presumption to propose, as of equal stability with the stupendous work of the Christian redemption.

The desire of making a religion for himself, instead of submitting to that which God is pleased to reveal to him, appears to have been the prevailing folly of man from the beginning. "Vain man," says the Scripture, "would be wise*:"— he presumes to sit in judgment on the propriety of the Divine commands; to make the conformity of the Divine dispensations to his own notions of fitness and expediency the sole criterion of their equity and wisdom; to provide for himself the means of salvation and acceptance with God; in short, to act as if he were an *independent* being, self-created, self-redeemed, self-sanctified. By this false wisdom, the first man lost Paradise; and, by pride of a similar kind, thousands of his descendants daily forfeit their title to the Tree of Life.

But if we bring these lofty pretensions to the test of sound reason and sober experience, considering what it is which man thus assumes an ability to perform, and how far he has ever yet succeeded in the attempt, we shall have abundant cause to adopt the

* Job, xi. 12.

language of the Psalmist: — "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? — Lord! lift THOU up the light of *thy* countenance upon us."*

The foundation of all religion is the knowledge of the true God, and of his will with respect to us. A religion which gives us not this information, deserves not the name of religion. It is none; or worse than none;—because, instead of instructing us in what is necessary for our well-being, it either deludes us with false hopes, or alarms us with groundless fears, and becomes destructive both of our present comfort and our everlasting welfare.

Towards proving how much knowledge of this kind it is possible for man to obtain by the light of nature only, it is of importance, in the first place, to know *what has ever yet been done by him without help from Revelation.*

But this it does not appear that we have any means of ascertaining; since, as far as history can guide us, we have no reason to believe that man was ever placed in such a predicament; but that, even in the darkest and most corrupt periods, he derived *some* portion of knowledge, however scanty and insufficient, from those fragments of early revelations, which tradition had preserved to him. So that what we usually call a state of nature is more properly a state of *traditional* knowledge, in which, though revealed religion may have been greatly obscured and defaced, yet in no instance, perhaps, has it been entirely obliterated.

* Psalm iv. 6.

There is no difficulty, however, in ascertaining what has actually been accomplished, in a condition the *nearest* to the supposed state of nature of any which has hitherto been known. And if, notwithstanding the advantages of those glimmerings of Revelation, it shall appear that men have been unable to arrive at the knowledge of what is necessary for their salvation, it cannot be unreasonable to conclude, that much less would they be able to acquire it, if the light of Revelation were totally extinguished.

Let us, then, fairly enquire into the attainments of the heathen world before the coming of Christ, and into those of barbarous and uncivilised countries in the present day: — for, as to the labours of Deistical philosophers in *Christian* countries, *their* testimony on such a point is, for obvious reasons, inadmissible.

Understanding, then, by the supposed state of nature, a state in which men have not the means of knowing the revealed will of God, *as such*, although what little knowledge they have of Divine truths may have been derived from obscure tradition of those truths revealed in the earliest ages to mankind, the condition of those countries which are *at this day* ignorant of the Gospel would afford, perhaps, the most decisive evidence for our purpose; because, from the long continuance of their deplorable debasement and corruption, they appear to be placed in almost as helpless and hopeless circumstances as if they had sprung from a race of beings

to whom the light of Revelation had never been vouchsafed.

But respecting these unhappy objects of our pity and concern, little dispute can arise; since, notwithstanding the attempts of some superficial theorists to gloss over the almost brutish ignorance of these savage tribes, it will hardly be contended by thinking and sober-minded men, that they furnish us with any proof of the capability of the human mind to attain, *without instruction*, to the knowledge of Divine truth. Dismissing, therefore, any particular consideration of *their* case, let us confine ourselves to a few brief observations on the ancient Gentile world.

St. Paul's description of the spiritual condition of the heathen* is generally allowed to be a faithful representation: and it exhibits in such striking colours their ignorance of the fundamental truths of religion, and the insufficiency of their notions of moral good and evil to prevent them from practising, and even deliberately approving, the grossest vices and enormities, that to plead, with such an example before us, for the ability of human reason, without the help of Revelation, to make men "wise unto salvation," appears to be a vain and extravagant undertaking.

Now, this (let it be remembered) was intended as a portraiture of the heathen world in general, not merely of the ignorant vulgar, but also of the most learned and accomplished characters of Greece and Rome. It was a picture drawn at a period of

* Rom. i. ver. 18. to the end.

great refinement; after the talents of such men as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, had been constantly exercised in endeavouring to enlighten and improve mankind. Here, then, all appears to have been done which it was possible to do by the *natural* powers of man (understanding by that expression the powers of man unaided by Revelation) towards the acquisition of moral and religious truth; and the result, not only according to the Apostle's representation, but according to the repeated confessions of the greatest philosophers, was plainly this — that the utmost stretch of their researches terminated in mere *opinion* and *conjecture:* that for these they were more indebted to obscure and uncertain *traditions* than to any clear deductions from principles of their own discovery; that their labours were not sufficient even to preserve themselves from doubt and error, much less to recover others from idolatry and corruption; and that nothing further was to be expected, nothing further was attainable, but by a Revelation from Heaven.

To those who are open to conviction, and are willing to take *facts* for the basis of their reasoning, this statement of the case of the heathen world will appear decisive of the controversy. But there are some who, in their zeal to magnify man's natural resources, and to disparage the blessing of Revelation, will hardly admit the confessions of heathens themselves as evidence to this point; nor will they allow that the defects of these ancient philosophers (supposing them to be as great as they are here repre-

sented to be) afford satisfactory proof that the powers of the human understanding are not *now* improvable, to a much greater extent than they were in ancient times. They contend that the world was then in the infancy of knowledge; and argue as if the illustrious sages of old (whom they nevertheless sometimes extol in terms of extravagant panegyric) were very babes in philosophy, such as the wise ones of later ages regard with a sort of contemptuous commiseration.

But may we not be permitted to ask, whence this assumed superiority of modern over ancient philosophers has arisen? and whence the extraordinary influx of light upon these latter times has been derived? Is there any one so infatuated by his admiration of the present age, as seriously to think that the intellectual powers of man are stronger and more perfect now than they were wont to be; or that the particular talents of himself or any of his cotemporaries are superior to those which shone forth in the luminaries of the Gentile world? Do the names even of Locke, Cudworth, Cumberland, Clarke, Wilkins, or Wollaston, (men so justly eminent in modern times, and who laboured so indefatigably to perfect the theory of natural religion,) convey to us an idea of greater intellectual ability than those of the consummate masters of the Portico, the Grove, or the Lyceum? How is it, then, that the advocates for the natural perfection, or perfectibility, of human reason do not perceive, that, for all the superiority of the present over former times,

with respect to religious knowledge, we must be indebted to *some intervening cause*, and not to any actual enlargement of the human faculties? Is it to be believed that any man of the present age, of whatever natural talents he may be possessed, could have advanced one step beyond the heathen philosophers in his pursuit of divine truth, had he lived in *their* times, and enjoyed only the light which was bestowed upon *them?* Or can it fairly be proved, that merely by the light of nature, or by reasoning upon such data only as men possess who never heard of revealed religion, any moral or religious truth has been discovered, since the days when Athens and Rome affected to give laws to the intellectual, as well as to the political, world? That great improvements have since been made in framing systems of ethics, of metaphysics, and of what is called natural theology, need not be denied. But these improvements may easily be traced to one obvious cause, the widely diffused light of the Gospel, which, having shone with more or less lustre on all nations, has imparted even to the most simple and illiterate of the sons of men such a degree of knowledge on these subjects as, without it, would be unattainable by the most learned and profound.

Having thus suggested a few observations, to show, from the experience of past and present times, that the mere light of nature *never did* enable men to arrive at the knowledge of divine truths, we might now proceed to combat the unbeliever on his own ground, and to prove, by arguments drawn from a

consideration of the faculties of the human mind, and the objects with which only it is naturally conversant, that reason, unenlightened by Revelation, *never can* arrive at such knowledge, from a total want of *foundation* on which to establish its positions.

But, before we enter upon this proof, it may be necessary, for the satisfaction of the believer rather than of the infidel, to consider what the *Scriptures* have declared on this subject.

St. Paul says, that "through *faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."* Here the very first doctrine which natural theology professes to inculcate is spoken of as the result of *faith*. And, in continuation of his subject, the Apostle adds, that "without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God, must *believe* that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him†:" implying, as it should seem, not that these fundamental doctrines are discoverable by the light of nature; but that they are to be received through faith in God, by whom they were originally revealed.

St. Paul occasionally argues, indeed, from the visible works of creation, and from the analogy between the natural and spiritual world, to show, in opposition to heathen polytheism and idolatry, the absurdity of not believing and worshipping the One True God. He reminds the people of Lystra, that

* Heb. xi. 3. † Ibid. 6.

God "left not himself without witness*," even in the darkest times. In preaching to the Athenians, he infers from the works of creation and providence, that it was the duty of men to "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being."† And again, in his Epistle to the Romans, speaking of the Gentiles, he says, "that which may be known of God, is manifest in them: for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."‡

But even from these passages, strong as they appear to be, it will be difficult to draw an argument in favour of the notion, that man may arrive at the knowledge of God without the light of Revelation. When we consider what St. Paul elsewhere says, that "the world by wisdom knew not God§," and that "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God‖;" together with the incontrovertible fact, that the heathen never did attain to any just notion of him, as the Creator, Preserver, or Governor of the Universe; it seems

* Acts, xiv. 17. † Acts, xvii. 27, 28.
‡ Rom. i. 19—21. § 1 Cor. i. 21. ‖ Heb. xi. 3.

more reasonable to understand the Apostle as maintaining only that the visible works of God bear such ample *testimony* to his existence and attributes as must render men inexcusable in not believing and obeying him, when these truths have been declared to them; and still more so in *changing* the truth of God into a lie, as the heathen did, "and worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator."

In like manner, St. Paul argues with the Corinthians on the natural and moral evidences of a resurrection from the dead and a future state, and charges those with *folly** who, with such testimonies in its favour, denied the credibility of the doctrine. Yet he elsewhere speaks of "life and immortality" as having been *brought to light* through the Gospel†;" and frequently grounds the assurance of it on the *promises of God.* "I know," saith he, "*in whom I have believed*‡:"—and again, "he is faithful who hath *promised.*"§ The patriarchs, and righteous men of old, he declares to have walked by *faith*, in the expectation of a blessed resurrection, according to God's promises‖;—and he reminds Titus, that "the hope of eternal life had been promised before the world began, and in due times manifested through preaching."¶—St. Peter teaches the same thing. He exhorts suffering Christians to "commit their souls to God as unto a

* 1 Cor. xv. 36. † 2 Tim. i. 10. ‡ 2 Tim. i. 12.
§ Heb. x. 23. ‖ Ib. xi. 13. ¶ Titus i. 2, 3.

faithful Creator*;" and declares, that "according to his *promises*, we look for a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."† St. John also says, "this is the *promise* that *He* hath *promised* us, even eternal life."‡

What St. Paul affirms, therefore, respecting men's belief of God and of a future state as primary articles of religion, is perfectly consistent with what is here contended for—the inability of man to discover them without some light from Revelation. There is nothing in his mode of expression which in any wise contravenes this position, or which tends to disprove that all the knowledge of these truths which is to be found amongst men has come down through the medium of written or traditional instruction, derived at first from Revelation. On the contrary, the most obvious interpretation of his meaning is, that men must have *faith* to believe these doctrines upon the testimony of God, by whom they were at first revealed; not that they must *reason* themselves into a belief of them by moral or metaphysical arguments.

It is, indeed, hardly possible to suppose that these truths were *not* revealed to man from the very beginning. For, can it reasonably be imagined that Adam was left (even in his primeval condition, when his faculties were unclouded by sin and corruption,) to acquire the knowledge of his Creator from such proofs only as the light of nature could afford him? or that he was suffered to remain in a

* 1 Peter, iv. 19. † 2 Peter, iii. 13. ‡ 1 John, ii. 25.

state of uncertainty and conjecture respecting the continuance of his being, his future destination, the purposes of his creation, the duties which he had to perform, the happiness provided for him, and the means of attaining it? On all these points, so essential to his comfort and well-being, must we not almost necessarily conclude, that he derived instruction immediately from the Fountain of Wisdom?

Equally improbable does it appear, that *after his fall* (when such an entire change had taken place in his views and expectations, when so much greater help was needful for him, and so much stronger assurance of the Divine favour towards him became requisite for his consolation and support,) he should be left to walk in darkness, or to trust to his own conjectural reasonings upon what had been *before* revealed to him. There is, indeed, sufficient evidence that fresh information was then vouchsafed to man, to show him the way of duty and of happiness. The very first promise of a Redeemer is a proof that some communication instantly took place between his Creator and him, relative to his altered condition: and we may well suppose (nay, we can hardly but suppose) that, so far as could be conducive to his restoration to life and happiness, every thing was explicitly revealed which it behoved him either to believe or to do, in order to his acceptance with God.

Here, then, we have an easy solution of the question, how the world became acquainted with the knowledge of God and of a future state, without

searching for it by abstract reasoning,—that is, by reasoning from notions supposed to be inherent in the mind,—or, indeed, from arguments of any kind independent of Divine communications.

From Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to the Jewish people, and from them to the rest of the world, these doctrines were handed down in succession, and occasionally confirmed, illustrated, or more largely unfolded, by subsequent revelations. Through these preachers of righteousness, whom God from time to time raised up, the Gentiles (in addition to such imperfect traditions of the fundamentals of religion as must have been preserved even among the most corrupt descendants of Noah) received continual instruction and admonition, until the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage; after which period they were still oftentimes witnesses of tremendous signs and wonders, wrought for the purpose of overthrowing their idolatrous worship, and impressing them with a belief and a dread of Jehovah, the God of Israel, who thus manifested himself in an especial manner as the true and only God, to the exclusion of all the imaginary deities of the heathen world.

Henceforward, the knowledge of revealed religion extended, by various means, far beyond those to whom it was directly communicated. Philosophers the most remote from the land of the Jews enjoyed opportunities, by their travels into Eastern countries, of enriching themselves with stores of religious truth

from the fountain-head. The earlier and later dispersions of the Jews greatly contributed to the diffusion of this blessing: and to the philosophers who immediately preceded the coming of Christ, the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures afforded a supply of information on divine subjects, which evidently raised them above their predecessors, and gave a dignity and weight to their speculations not to be found in those of remoter ages. Thus, from the important epoch when God vouchsafed to become peculiarly and exclusively as it were the Deity of his people Israel, the rest of mankind were enabled through these various channels to collect many scattered fragments of divine knowledge, in addition to those general notions which they had derived from their forefathers, respecting the great fundamental principles of theology and morals.

Further evidence than this the perverseness of man was not entitled to expect; nor could this, if duly improved, have failed to secure him against gross and dangerous error: for, the truths thus transmitted by tradition, or obtained by intercourse with the favoured people of God, though not discoverable by the light of nature, are, when revealed, so congenial with the feelings, and so consonant with the reason, of mankind, that to lose the knowledge of them, or wilfully to renounce them, argues an unpardonable degree of neglect or depravity. Yet of such depravity or neglect the Gentile world, with all its boasted wisdom and virtue, appears to have been guilty. "That which may be known of God,"

the Apostle says, "was manifest in them, for "God had *showed* it unto them*;" that is, he had originally taught it them by Revelation. They were "without excuse†," therefore, not for their inability to *find out* this knowledge; but for not *retaining* it, *not liking to retain it*‡, as the same Apostle says, after it had been made known to them. They *apostatised* from the truth; or, if they retained any portion of it (since to lose it entirely was scarcely possible), they "held it in unrighteousness," defaced it by many corruptions in principle, and still more in practice; gave themselves up to vile affections, to idolatry, polytheism, or profane ridicule of the most awful truths of religion: — and all this, not so much from *ignorance*, as from *self-will*; in punishment of which, God "gave them up to a reprobate mind, to work those things which are not convenient."§ — Such is the scriptural account of the matter; and we may safely challenge the infidel to frame one that is more probable and consistent.

What has here been said respecting that knowledge of God, and of a future state, which some have supposed men to be capable of acquiring without the help of Revelation, may also be applied to that sense of *moral obligation*, which, according to many, is inherent in the human mind, and is thought to furnish evidence of the ability of man to frame an acceptable religion, without any other guide than the light of nature.

* Rom. i. 19. † Id. i. 20. ‡ Id. i. 28. § Id. i. 28.

St. Paul says, that "when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another*:—this text has often been brought to support the opinion of the sufficiency of natural religion as a rule of conduct. But, without entering into refined or doubtful criticisms on the text itself, it is to be observed, that, with regard to the knowledge of moral duties, the heathens appear to have stood in the same predicament as they did with respect to the knowledge of God. Man's religious and moral duties were, no doubt, *revealed* to him from the beginning, and handed down to succeeding generations; from whose minds they could never be entirely obliterated, however obscured and defaced. The precepts of *Noah* have generally been considered by learned men, and especially by the Jewish writers, as forming the basis of every moral code promulgated in the Gentile world: and hence we may easily account for the noble sentiments of morality which occur in heathen writers, as we have already accounted for their sublime and sometimes just speculations on the divine nature and perfections. In this sense the Gentiles were undoubtedly "a law unto themselves." They had certain general principles of moral duty transmitted to them from the patriarchs, occasionally confirmed and

* Rom. ii. 14, 15.

illustrated by subsequent intercourse with the chosen people of God, or by some acquaintance with the Sacred Writings: and though they were not in *covenant* with God, nor were favoured, as the Jews were, with his especial presence and instruction, yet the partial knowledge of his laws, thus impressed upon their minds by tradition and by education, so far operated on their conscience as to render them self-condemned or self-approved, according as they deviated from them, or conducted themselves conformably to their spirit and intention.

Thus it appears that neither experience nor Scripture will warrant us in the supposition that man has ever yet been able, by the mere light of nature, to attain to a competent knowledge of religious truth. Let us now take a different view of the subject, and endeavour to show, by arguments of another kind, how impossible it is for him to lay any *foundation* for such knowledge, other than that which is already laid in the revealed will of God.

From a consideration of the powers and faculties of the human understanding, it is demonstrable that it cannot attain to knowledge of any kind *without some external communication.* It cannot *perceive,* unless an *impression* be made on the *organs* of perception: — it cannot form *ideas,* without *perceptions:* — it cannot *judge,* without a *comparison of ideas:* — it cannot form a *proposition,* without this exercise of its *judgment:* — it cannot *reason,* argue, or syllogise, without this previous formation of *propositions* to be examined and compared. Such is

the procedure of the human understanding, in the work of ratiocination: whence it clearly follows, that it can in the first instance do nothing of itself; that is, it cannot *begin* its operations till it be supplied with materials to work upon, which materials must come *from without;* and that the mind unfurnished with these is incapable of attaining even to the lowest degree of knowledge.

The first question, therefore, is, what are the *inlets* of knowledge; what the channels through which the mind is to be supplied with these necessary means of information?—Logicians speak of these as various; namely, sense, consciousness, intelligence, reason, faith, and inspiration. But all these seem reducible to the two general heads of *sense* and *inspiration;* since either from the one or the other of these every species of knowledge must be ultimately derived. For, abstract reasoning without *ideas* is impossible; and unless we suppose ideas to be *innate*, (which, from the most accurate observation, is proved to be contrary to *fact*,) we shall find it difficult to assign any definite meaning to consciousness, intelligence, reason, or faith, if entirely unconnected with sense or inspiration.

To which of these, then, to *sense* or *inspiration*, (or, in other words, to man's faculties instructed by what the visible world presents to his view, or by what God may be pleased to reveal to him,) can we most reasonably ascribe his knowledge of the Divine nature and attributes, of a future state, and of moral good and evil?

Satisfactorily to demonstrate the Divine nature and attributes, or even the existence of God, by arguments *à priori*, appears (if we may judge from what has hitherto been attempted by the ablest metaphysical writers) to be beyond the reach of man. If, therefore, these can be proved at all without Revelation, it must be by reasoning *à posteriori*, or induction from the phenomena of the natural world. But we may venture to affirm, that even in *this* mode of investigation, however plain and convincing the arguments derived from it may appear to *us* who are already in possession of the truth, man would not have attained to any firm and settled conviction upon these points, had God never vouchsafed to manifest himself by proofs of a more direct and irresistible kind.

Between matter and spirit, things visible and invisible, time and eternity, beings finite and beings infinite, objects of sense and objects of faith, the connection is not perceptible to human observation. Though we push our researches, therefore, to the extreme point whither the light of nature can carry us, they will, in the end, be abruptly terminated; and we must stop short, at an immeasurable chasm between the creature and the Creator. As soon, indeed, as the Creator is *shown* to us,—that is, as soon as we are *taught* that there is a Creator necessarily existent, and of infinite perfections,—our understandings readily admit the idea of such a being; and we find in the natural world innumerable *testimonies* to the truth of the doctrine. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work:" and we should be "without excuse," did

we not acknowledge that he hath "never left himself without witness," and that "in Him we live, and move, and have our being;" or did we not, under the influence of such an impression, "glorify him as God." But these testimonies, though evidently designed to corroborate the truth, and to preserve it from being disregarded or forgotten, do not appear to be the *source* from whence the first knowledge of it was derived. For *this* we are compelled to search elsewhere. And since there is no proof that men ever *did* arrive at this knowledge without some previous *instruction*, or that it *can* be acquired merely by observation on the natural and visible world; what conclusion appears so rational and satisfactory, as that it was from the beginning communicated to man by the Creator himself?

Let it not, however, be surmised, that in these arguments respecting the inability of man to discover by the light of nature the attributes or even the existence of God, there is any thing which can furnish *atheism* with the shadow of an apology. Nothing can be more irrational, nothing betrays greater stupidity or perverseness, than to embrace atheism, after the idea of a God has been once communicated to the mind. Only propose this truth to the understanding (accompanied with those almost irresistible arguments in confirmation of it which may be deduced from every object around us), and it must gain instant admission, unless the heart be so hardened, and the eyes so

blinded, that we can neither see nor understand. Still it may be no less certain that this is a truth *originally made known by Revelation*, not discovered by the light of nature; and that they to whom it has never been *communicated* can never acquire it.

If, therefore, we were employed in endeavouring to convert an atheist, who, as such, would doubtless be indisposed to receive this truth on the ground of *authority* only, we must necessarily refer him to those *testimonies* which the natural and moral phenomena of the world abundantly supply, of a Creator all-wise, powerful, and good; and thence show the extreme absurdity of disbelieving the existence of such a being. These testimonies are so powerful and convincing as to render any man inexcusable in refusing to admit the notion of a God, when thus presented to him, unless he be incurably defective in his understanding. But if he were further to enquire, "how came you by this idea, or how came mankind in general to have it? did you, or they, discover it of yourselves? or were you taught it by others?"—the obvious answer would be, "We were not left to ourselves to find it out;—we have all been *taught* it by our *forefathers;*—and our forefathers were taught it of God:—but as soon as we were thus made acquainted with it, we found it so strongly *confirmed* by every thing which the visible world presents to our view, that we required no additional evidence, nor any further Revelation to declare it." After such an explanation, what excuse could atheism allege? or what cause would it have

to triumph in the acknowledgment that the existence and attributes of God are not to be discovered by the light of nature alone?

Having thus endeavoured to show, that even a knowledge of the being and attributes of God must have been originally derived from Revelation, it seems hardly necessary to enter into a discussion of other points subordinate to those, in order to prove that an acquaintance with *them* likewise is to be traced to the same primary source.

The natural and moral evidences of a *future state* have been allowed by most enquirers, and especially by the *ancient* philosophers (who may be considered as the most impartial and the most competent judges of the question), to fall far short of demonstration, and to afford at best but unsolid and unsatisfactory grounds of expectation. From the natural and moral world may, indeed, be brought innumerable *illustrations* and *attestations* of this momentous truth, as well as of the being and perfection of the Creator; sufficient, in the one case as in the other, to obtain for the doctrine a ready admission into the human mind, and to preserve it, when made known, from ever being entirely effaced. But as *demonstrations* of the doctrine, without some declaratory and authoritative assurance from the Author of our being, we cannot but think that, as they have ever hitherto been, so they ever will be found inadequate.—Nature, in both instances (if we may apply to this subject what the Evangelist says in comparing the Baptist with our blessed

Saviour*), "*is not that light*" which can show us the doctrine itself, but only "bears *witness* to that light," either as its precursor to prepare men for its reception, when it has been for a while almost extinguished and forgotten, or as its concomitant and attendant to awaken their attention to it, and to prevent them from beholding it with indifference or neglect.

The attempt to frame systems of *moral duty* without reference to the *revealed* will of God, is attended with little better success. The beneficial effects produced by a strict regard to sobriety, justice, and holiness are, indeed, so conspicuous, that when these duties are pointed out to us, we immediately discern their utility and importance. But that a perception of the advantages resulting from them is not sufficient of itself to secure their performance, or to bring men to an agreement as to their nature and obligation, is apparent from the infinite diversity and discordance of the several systems which have been framed by speculative men, and especially from the acknowledged imperfection of those which governed the practice of the heathen world. Here, as in the other instances, *Revelation* is necessary to "show what is good," to declare it authoritatively, and to give it the sanction of a lawgiver from whom there can be no appeal. All that the moral sense within ourselves, or our observation on the effects produced by it on others, can do, is to give *testimony* to the excellence of the

* John, i. 8.

law and to the perfections of its divine Author, and to make us ever *mindful* of its obligation; "our *conscience*," (as St. Paul expresses it) "*bearing witness*, and our thoughts accusing or excusing one another," according to our violation or observance of the Divine commands.

Moreover, the obligation of moral duty, as well as the certainty of a future state, depends upon another grand point, *the immortality of the soul;* which baffles all our researches by the light of nature only, and may justly be reckoned among the *incognita* of human reason, till declared on the authority of Revelation. If the soul be *not* immortal, and, consequently, there be no future state of rewards and punishments, enquiries into rules of moral duty become comparatively of little importance. If there *be* such a state, then comes the anxious question, "What we must do, to inherit eternal life?" — a question, which none but the Creator himself can resolve.

But with respect to all these doctrines, the being and nature of God, the immortality of the soul, a future state of rewards and punishments, and the obligation of moral duty, it may be observed, that they who have been instructed in them from their infancy are so accustomed to consider them as natural and necessary truths, that they are little aware in what manner the knowledge of them has been first acquired. They suppose them to be deductions from natural principles, or discoveries of human reason; because they are in all respects so

congenial with our hopes and wishes, and are so strongly attested by every thing which passes under our contemplation in the natural and moral world, that they cannot be relinquished without doing violence to the feelings and to the understanding. Yet nothing is more certain than that philosophers of old never arrived at a *knowledge* of these truths, never attained to a *conviction* of any one of them: nor is there, perhaps, at this day, a savage nation on the globe which can properly be said to know or to believe them. Glimmerings of light and information there have always been; enough to excite the hopes, and fears, and wishes of mankind, but not enough to confirm their expectations.

Thus it appears that they who reject revelation have no solid *foundation* to build upon; even though we should allow reason to be in a far more perfect state than that in which it actually is. But never is it to be forgotten that reason is now corrupt and vitiated, and therefore much less capable of performing its functions than has hitherto, for argument's sake, been supposed. Since the fall of man, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint*:" and if, according to the heathen sage, to "know ourselves" be a fundamental maxim of wisdom, how much does it behove us to know and consider this our imperfect state, before we presume to speculate upon religious truths? St. Paul, reflecting on the nature of fallen man and the conflict within him between good and evil, and that there "is a

* Isaiah, i. 5.

law in the members warring against the law of the mind," exclaims, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" * How, indeed, can such a nature as this be expected to frame a sufficient law unto itself, or to devise a religion acceptable in the sight of God? Or, supposing this great task accomplished, how shall man, thus distracted by opposite propensities, *perform* what is required of him? Where are the helps for human infirmity and the remedies for human corruption? or what assurance has he that God will not exact the full performance of all that man *knows* to be his duty? On what ground will he claim *reward* even for his best services? Much more, how will he *atone* for his past offences? how will he satisfy the just indignation of God, or stand before the judgment-seat, and look with confidence for pardon and acceptance? To these questions one answer alone can be returned;—that they relate to points, which, however deeply and awfully interesting to mankind, depend exclusively on the will of God, and can only be made known by *Him*, or by those to whom *He* hath revealed them.

If, then, no system can be well founded or worthy of acceptance which rests on unwarrantable hypothesis or uncertain premises, and which is not applicable to the purpose for which it is intended; need we hesitate to affirm of natural religion, as contradistinguished from revealed, that it is destitute of solid foundations, and wholly unsuitable to

* Rom. vii. 23, 24.

the condition of man? Even as to its primary and most important doctrines, it is fluctuating in its principles, and has no other support than conjecture or opinion. It is also inapplicable to its intended purpose; because it regards us not as *fallen* creatures. It makes no provision for our wants and infirmities, provides no remedy for our corruptions, offers no atonement for our offences, has no Redeemer, no Sanctifier, no means of grace, no covenanted terms of acceptance.

It seems impossible, indeed, to suppose, that on any of the fundamental articles of religion, man should be able, *of himself*, to obtain satisfactory information, unless we admit the doctrine of *innate* ideas, and believe that such truths are by nature indelibly stamped upon our minds. But this would involve us in fresh difficulties. For, how shall we then account for the acknowledged ignorance of mankind respecting these truths, where revealed religion is lost or defaced? or how is it that any difference of opinion concerning them should ever have subsisted among men, except such as may be accounted for from the comparative strength or weakness of their intellects? If the knowledge of the true God, of the immortality of the soul and a future state, and of the eternal and immutable distinction between moral good and evil, be *innate ideas*, how happens it that opinions so wide of the truth, and so contradictory to each other, respecting *all* these points, have prevailed not only among individuals, but among whole communities and na-

tions? On the supposition of these instinctive notions of religion and virtue, it should seem that education as well as Revelation were almost superfluous; that the savage might have as clear a perception of divine truths as the most enlightened philosopher; and that the philosopher would be as firmly persuaded of them as the Christian. But is this the case? was it ever the case? or will any Deist, notwithstanding his reluctance to acknowledge the necessity of Revelation, have the hardiness to answer in the affirmative?

The sum of what has been advanced is this:—Man was, from the beginning, endued with intellectual powers, capable of receiving and understanding religious truths. But these truths being neither discernible by the senses, nor innate in the mind, could only be communicated by Divine instruction. It is, therefore, necessarily to be supposed, that God *revealed* them to our first parents; to the intent (as the Psalmist says, respecting the dealings of Jehovah with his people Israel,) "that the generations to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to *their* children; that they might set their hope in God." * The preservation of these doctrines in their pure and genuine state, would depend on the care and attention of mankind, or on such additional revelations as the Almighty might be pleased to make. After the fall, other truths concerning man's redemption were also revealed, to be transmitted in

* Psalm lxxvii. 6, 7.

like manner to posterity, and perpetuated by such means as God should see fit to provide. These, however, as well as the former truths, were in process of time, through the folly and perverseness of man, miserably corrupted and obscured; though to lose them *entirely* was scarcely possible. Moreover, God vouchsafed, "at sundry times and in divers manners," to manifest himself to mankind by such acts of power and goodness as could not but forcibly remind them of his Being and Attributes, and of their dependence on him for life and salvation. Hence, even in the worst of times, divine knowledge was never wholly extinct; and men were inexcusable in disregarding the testimonies which the natural and moral world presented to their view, of the certainty of those fundamental doctrines in which they had been originally instructed. Still, however, their total inability to find out these doctrines by any other light than that of Revelation, was only rendered more conspicuous by their continual aberrations from the truth, and by their increased depravity and ignorance, as they receded farther and farther from the Fountain of heavenly Wisdom.

Such is the general purport of the arguments which have been brought to prove that there is no solid *foundation* for any knowledge of divine truth, except the revelation which God hath been pleased to make. Other important considerations might be urged to the same effect; particularly that of the *origin of language*, which appears to afford almost a decisive proof that man must have been originally

favoured with immediate instruction from his Creator. But a discussion of this subject would lead us into a wider range than our present limits will admit. We might also show that no *counterfeit* revelation, no work of imposture or enthusiasm, hath any such basis to rest upon as the religion for which we contend. But this will more properly be considered, when we come to compare the *evidences* of false religions with those of the true one.

At present, it has been our sole endeavour to prove that *some* revelation is absolutely necessary to instruct mankind in the knowledge of divine truths. If the arguments to this effect be valid, the infidel is deprived of his first strong hold, that of the supposed ability of man to frame his own religion: and we may apply to him what St. Paul, in the text, applies to preachers of heresy and false doctrine, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We may also see abundant cause to be thankful that such a foundation *is* laid; on which, as on a rock, we may build our everlasting hope, which neither the rains, nor the winds, nor the tempests, shall be able to overthrow, but which shall stand unshaken from generation to generation.

THE INSUFFICIENCY OF NATURAL OR MORAL PHILOSOPHY TO INSTRUCT US IN RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

1 Cor. iii. 19.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

However plain and incontrovertible may be the arguments which we bring to prove the necessity of Revelation, we shall always find it a matter of difficulty to convince those who attach themselves to "the wisdom of this world" that we have truth on our side. The votaries of philosophy will hardly suffer us to question the sufficiency of their natural faculties to instruct them upon every subject, divine as well as human; and the advocate for natural religion will be ready to enter his protest against any thing that seems to derogate from the dignity of human nature. "Reason," it will still be said, "is the gift of God, and ought to be prized above all other gifts: it ought on every occasion to be consulted, and its suggestions implicitly obeyed; since otherwise we degrade ourselves to the rank of brutes, and insult the Creator by depreciating the noblest work of his hands."

This kind of language will never fail to gain attention and applause. But when the point which we have hitherto maintained (that of the inability of man to frame a religion for himself) is clearly understood and fairly represented, it will not be found to depreciate any *just* pretensions of the human understanding: for, what real disparagement to its faculties can it be, to say that man must be "taught of God," before he can have any knowledge of Divine truths? Or how can reason be more nobly or usefully employed, than in receiving instruction from him who is the Fountain of Wisdom, and in deducing from what he is pleased to reveal truths of the highest importance? Who gave us reason and understanding? who furnished us with a capacity of apprehending truths of any kind? Who, but God himself? "Now," (as St. Paul argued respecting the gifts of the Holy Spirit) "if thou didst *receive*" this capacity, "why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"* To what purpose, indeed, are our rational faculties bestowed, unless they be supplied with the necessary means of attaining spiritual as well as natural knowledge? And whence can these be derived but from "the Father of Spirits?"

Shall we, then, deny to God the exclusive right of imparting to us this knowledge, in such way as he may think fit? or shall we call in question his power to communicate it in one way rather than in another? He that made the eye, shall "he not

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

see?"* — and he that gave man *reason, the eye of the mind,* shall he not enlighten and instruct it, as seemeth to him best? The *bodily* eye is capable of perceiving *natural* objects, and of thereby conveying to the mind a continual accession of ideas: but how could it perform this office unless there were *light* to render these objects visible? The *mental* eye, in like manner, is capable of discerning *spiritual* truths: but to what purpose would it possess this faculty, unless these truths were rendered discernible, by a sufficiency of light to bring them to its view; and whence can that light issue, but from the source of spiritual illumination? In both cases, the natural objects and the spiritual truths have, indeed, their existence, independently of our perception of them: but, except so far as the natural light in the one case, and the light of Revelation in the other, is cast upon them, they are, to us, as if they did not exist. As well, therefore, might we affirm that the eye can see in darkness, as that reason can discover spiritual truths without the light of Revelation.

If these considerations do not appear convincing to those who maintain the all-sufficiency of men's natural reason, it is, perhaps, in vain to hope for a more favourable reception of the Apostle's assertion in the text, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." By this wisdom is to be understood the *philosophy* of the ancient heathen; that wisdom, which was the result of the most dili-

* Psalm xciv. 9.

gent and painful researches of the human mind, during the long period of darkness in the Gentile world, from the patriarchal ages to the coming of Christ; and which, notwithstanding the vain boastings of its professors, is here declared to be foolishness "with God." — To a *Christian*, it might be supposed, this declaration must be decisive: but with an *infidel*, the bare assertion even of an inspired Apostle can hardly be expected to have weight. That we may not, therefore, seem abruptly to repel the advocate for reason and natural religion, let us again join issue with him; and farther examine the claims of that earthly wisdom, or philosophy, which is so ready to take offence at any attempt to lessen its importance.

It is not reason itself, but the abuse of reason, which, under the denomination of the wisdom of this world, the Apostle here speaks of in such contemptuous terms. Reason, rightly applied, will teach men modesty and humility; nothing being more *irrational* than pride and self-sufficiency. It is, therefore, the misapplication of reason to subjects beyond its proper sphere that is here stigmatised as "foolishness with God." It is "the wisdom of *this world*," as contradistinguished from or set in opposition to Divine wisdom; which, far from being rational and worthy of honour, is but vain and presumptuous folly.

That reason itself is the gift of God, it were ungrateful and impious to deny. It is a spark of the Divine intellect, communicated to man at his crea-

tion, and transmitted to his posterity from generation to generation. We cannot be too thankful for this precious gift, by which we are raised above the brute creatures, and are made capable of receiving all the knowledge that can be imparted to us, whether natural or spiritual. That it is bestowed upon us for our general guidance, and to be our constant defence against error and delusion; and that it ought, therefore, to be diligently cultivated and improved; none can doubt, who possess it and understand its value.

But to infer from hence, that human reason is to be the measure and standard of Divine truth, and that it supersedes the necessity of Revelation, is a sophism the most egregious. Can reason exalt men to the rank of angels, and to an equality with God? Can it penetrate the secrets of the natural, much more of the spiritual world? Can it traverse the universe? compass omnipotence? explore omniscience? calculate infinity? measure immensity? grasp eternity? Can it see things invisible? hear things ineffable? discern the world of spirits? and scan the counsels of the Most High? Yet all this must it be able to perform, before it can, by dint of its own natural powers, attain to such an acquaintance with God and with spiritual truths as Revelation professes to make known, and which (if Revelation be true) it absolutely behoves us to act upon as well as to believe. If, then, the vainest of philosophical enthusiasts will scarcely pretend to such vast powers of intellect as these, but must be compelled to say with the Psalmist, "such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent

for me, I cannot attain unto it*;"—have we not, without further enquiry, sufficient grounds to insist, with the Apostle, that "the wisdom of this world," when it presumes to fathom the depths of Divine truth with its own scanty line of knowledge, must be "foolishness with God?"

But it is the error of those who contend that all necessary truth is discoverable or demonstrable by reason, that they affirm of *human* reason in *particular* what is only true of reason *in general*, or of reason in the abstract. To say that whatever is true must be either discoverable or demonstrable by reason, can only be affirmed of an *all-perfect* reason: and is, therefore, predicable of none but the *Divine* intellect. So that unless it can be shown that *human* reason is the same, in degree as well as in kind, with *Divine* reason,—that is, is commensurate with it as to its powers, and equally incapable of error,—the inference, from reason in the abstract to *human* reason, is manifestly inconclusive. Nothing more is necessary, to show the fallacy of this mode of arguing, than to urge the indisputable truth, that God is wiser than man, and has endued man with only a *portion* of that faculty which He himself, and none other besides Him, possesses in absolute perfection.

But, to bring the main question to a stricter scrutiny, let us take a more particular view of the two great branches of human science, natural and moral philosophy, so far as they are connected with religious truth.

* Psalm cxxxix. 5.

They who oppose the authority of Revelation, and argue for the sufficiency of man's natural reason to guide him into all necessary truth, are fond of insisting upon modern discoveries and improvements in the various branches of natural philosophy, as affording proof of the gradual progress of the human mind towards perfection in *every* branch of knowledge, spiritual as well as natural. To show the fallacy of such reasoning, it is necessary to examine the *boundaries* of natural philosophy; to ascertain its principles and its object; to know where it begins and where it ends: since it is much to be apprehended, that, in arguments of this kind, great mistakes arise from confounding things natural with things spiritual, and from applying the principles of one kind of knowledge to another which depends upon axioms and data of a totally different description.

To prove this, there is no need to enter into a discussion of the various systems of physics, from the times of Thales and Pythagoras to the present day; nor to descant upon the favourite theories, which, at different periods, have most generally prevailed. Fashion, on this as on every other topic, has often given currency to opinions in one age which in the next have been abandoned as ill-founded; and, for the most part, the *newest* philosophy, whatever it might be, has been admired and vindicated as alone worthy of acceptance. The trouble, therefore, may well be spared, on this occasion, of developing the doctrine of the Oriental, Grecian, Roman, or modern schools. Sufficient will it be to state briefly what has

or has not been done by any of them, towards elucidating the *Divine* mode of operation even in the *natural* world; and to show that nothing in the way of *natural* philosophy can lead men to a knowledge of *spiritual* truths.

It has justly been observed of the *ancient* teachers of physics, that "their philosophy was so metamorphosed into divinity, that it is scarcely possible to separate the one from the other."* In *their* writings, therefore, we shall have the clearest proof how far natural philosophy will enable men to attain to divine knowledge; since, as to *moderns*, if they profess any belief in Revelation, they are usually careful to keep these subjects distinct and separate, as if aware that the study of physics has nothing in common with the study of theology.

That the ancients had clear and just conceptions of some fundamental truths in physics; that they were well acquainted with the general mechanism of nature; and that in knowledge of this kind the *earliest* writers were the most intelligent and correct; are points which seem to be pretty clearly established by those who have given them diligent and impartial consideration. That their skill in the mechanical arts, in the mathematical sciences, and also in medical knowledge, was very considerable, has been no less satisfactorily proved. But in all their philosophical systems there appears to be one general and fundamental error, that of regarding the *powers* of nature as the *gods* of nature; or, in

* Jones.

other words, considering the merely *physical* or *instrumental* agents of the universe as endowed with *intellectual* energies, and to be reverenced as *divinities*, or intelligent rulers of the world. This was one fruitful source of the Gentile polytheism and idolatry; and the only modification of this principle which seems to bring it nearer to a rational notion of a Supreme Being (and which has accordingly led some of the learned to contend for their supposed knowledge of the divine unity), is their imaginary doctrine of the *anima mundi*, or intelligent spirit pervading the universe, and giving life and activity to the whole. This, however, proved no check to polytheism; because the subordinate powers of nature were still held to be fit objects of worship, however dependent upon this universal agent. Moreover, if the doctrine of the *anima mundi* be thoroughly scrutinised, it will perhaps be found to mean nothing more than that there is a subtle and imperceptible, yet *material* principle, possessed of an inherent self-activity, by which it becomes the originating cause of activity in all other bodies; or, at most, that it is the parent mass of intellect or spirit, whence all other intellects or spirits emanate (as of *physical necessity*, not by any act of volition), and into which they are all ultimately resolved. But in neither of these senses, nor in any other whereby it can consistently be explained, does it convey any notion correspondent with that of a Deity endued with moral and intellectual perfections.

That the greatest and wisest philosophers, from Thales and Pythagoras to Plato, including the several sects into which the Ionic and Italic philosophy were divided, taught no doctrine more nearly approaching to theological truth than this, may, perhaps, be safely affirmed. That Aristotle, though he differed considerably from his teachers on these points, wandered still farther from the truth, will hardly be denied in the present times, however he may have been formerly held up to extravagant veneration by his bigoted adherents. Perhaps, indeed, the implicit deference which, for a long series of ages, was paid to his philosophy, best accounts for the many gross errors on theological subjects which prevailed throughout Christendom till the Protestant Reformation. And although, in later times, that homage has ceased to be paid to the name of Aristotle, and the philosophical world has long since asserted its liberty to range, uncontrolled by authority, through all the regions of philosophy; yet it is by no means to be admitted, that the discoveries or improvements of modern enquiries have added any thing of solid information to our *theological* knowledge; neither has it been proved, that any proficiency in the study of physics is *capable* of leading us to a knowledge of divine or spiritual truths.

Happy indeed were it, if even *Christian* philosophers had not, in some instances, given occasion to the enemies of our faith to blaspheme, and to turn the artillery of physics, as well as of metaphysics,

against Divine Revelation. With these, however, we have at present no concern. It is sufficient for our purpose to show, that philosophy, in whatever hands it may be placed, never can instruct us in theology, nor make us "wise unto salvation."

If the mechanism of nature, or those powers by which its operations are carried on, be better understood now than formerly, it is chiefly because the investigation of it has been facilitated by an improvement in the instruments necessary for experimental observation; by the help of which some important natural phenomena have been discovered, which were before unobserved. For it is the distinguishing and honourable characteristic of natural philosophy (since Bacon led the way in fixing its principles), that it has rejected as unsafe, and leading only to visionary speculations, all reasoning *à priori* respecting the subjects of which it treats, and admits nothing as matter of science which is not susceptible of *experimental* proof. Still, however, its *limits*, as a science, are precisely the same as heretofore; because the *objects* on which it is employed are the same as they ever were, and ever must be. Beyond the *instrumental* agents of the natural world it cannot possibly extend its observations. On these its exclusive attention is employed: and the only deduction which it can make from them, conducive to religious knowledge, is, that there must be a supreme intelligent Author, Disposer, and Superintendent of that stupendous machinery which is presented to its contemplation.

Farther than this, with respect to the discovery of Divine truth, the philosophy of nature cannot possibly advance: and even thus far it never *did* go in ancient times; nor, probably, ever *would* have gone without the aid of Revelation.

To argue, therefore, (as too many are inclined to do) from modern discoveries in chemistry, pneumatics, electricity, or the like, that human knowledge in general is not only progressive but *unlimited*, is unwarrantable and presumptuous. Still more so is it, to infer that our improvement in *spiritual* attainments will necessarily keep pace with our advancement in experimental philosophy; since the study of *physics* has nothing in common with *theology*, properly so called, either as to its *principles*, or the *subjects* on which it is employed, or the *end* which it proposes. In physics, our actual observation cannot extend beyond *second* causes, or the instrumental agents of the *material* world. The *first cause* will still be as remote as ever from our view; and the *immaterial* world will still elude our researches. What avails it, then, to boast of the inventions of the telescope, the microscope, the air-pump, and the like? Greatly as the progress of *human* arts and sciences may have been promoted by these inventions, yet we are not one step nearer to *Divine* knowledge by any thing which they can do for us, nor at all better able by their means to "find out the Almighty to perfection;" who still dwells in pavilions of darkness inaccessible to human sight. In short, natural philosophy being

confined to sensible and material objects, cannot attain to even a glimpse of spiritual truth; and consequently is incapable, *per se*, of instructing men in what it most concerns them to understand—the knowledge of God, or even of *man*, so far as he is a spiritual and intellectual being.

The ancient philosophers bear testimony to the truth of this representation; since most, if not all of them, appear to have stopped short of the Great First Cause of all things, and to have ascribed the operations of nature to agents, which every one instructed in religious wisdom knows to be but instruments in the hand of God. Polytheism was the fruit of this false philosophy. But polytheism, proceeding from such principles, savours of *atheism;* since, in worshipping second causes, to the exclusion of the first, it gives to the creatures the honour due to the Creator, and virtually denies his attributes, if not his existence.

But, it may be said, it was not thus with later philosophers, such as Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Des Cartes, or Leibnitz; who, whatever difference of opinion there might be among them respecting the mode of operation by natural agents or secondary causes, all concurred in ascribing the *powers* with which these were endued to the supreme Author of Nature; and were foremost to expose the absurdity of atheistical tenets. True:—but these were *Christians;* these were believers in *Revelation;* and were not led by philosophy only to an acknowledgment of the true God. *Their* suffrage is therefore

to be placed to the account of religion, rather than of philosophy. By *faith* they believed in God; and their philosophical reasoning on his being and attributes was confined to its just province, that of illustrating his perfections by observations on the wonders of the natural world: thus corroborating the truths which they had received from Revelation, by the testimony which the works of creation bear to their Divine Author; not attempting to ground those truths on the basis of human science.

Thus pursued, natural philosophy will always be found reconcileable with religion, and even confirmatory of its truth. It is its proper office to solve the phenomena of nature, upon principles which preserve inviolate the distinction between secondary causes and the First Cause; reverently to explore the mechanism of the universe; and to regard all the material agents (or, rather, instruments) by which its operations are performed as the productions of a Divine Artificer, who bestowed upon them such powers as they are endued with, and ordained them thus to act by physical laws, which cannot be broken without his special permission. Philosophy oversteps not its just boundaries in freely investigating the nature of those powers, and enquiring *how* they act in producing such phenomena; these investigations being perfectly compatible with an acknowledgment of a Prime Efficient Cause, the Supreme Ruler and Governor, as well as Author, of all created being. It has, therefore, a most ample range of enquiry, and sources of experiment and specula-

tion inexhaustible, without endangering men's religious faith. But from the moment it presumes to pass its prescribed limits, and would make natural phenomena the standard of spiritual and Divine truth, it is out of its proper element. It then becomes "vain philosophy," or "philosophy falsely so called:" and, however it may be dignified and extolled as wisdom by rash and inconsiderate *man*, it is "*foolishness with God*."

Let us now turn our thoughts to the pretensions of *moral* philosophy.

It is the observation of one* who had made the extent of the human faculties his peculiar study, that "philosophy is as unable to give rules, as nature is to practise them." Various are the principles which have been adopted as the basis of morals, by ancient and modern theorists; such as utility, expediency, the fitness of things, the beauty of virtue, the moral sense or conscience, justice, veracity, public good, and the like; some of which differ from each other rather in name than in substance. But in every system which proposes to establish morality on any other basis than that of the revealed will of God there is one fundamental defect, that no satisfactory account is given of *moral obligation*, properly so called. For supposing any of these theories to be sufficiently well-founded; the question will still return, "Why am I obliged to act thus? Why am I obliged to act in conformity with truth, utility, fitness of things, or any other criterion which may

* Baker on Human Learning, chap. 6.

be proposed as the test of right and wrong?" To these questions no effectual answer can be given, but that it is *the will of God;* and that if we obey not *his* will, we must abide the consequences, and suffer the penalties attached to disobedience. This is the *sanction*, the *only* sanction, which can strictly be said to *oblige* us to any particular rule of conduct: and this (as was before observed) must depend on the *declared* purpose of the Almighty to reward or punish us, according to our conformity or opposition to such rule.

The advocates, however, for the sufficiency of natural religion are not to be so easily repulsed. They will contend, in the first place, that this is admitting a very degrading principle of conduct; and that it is more consonant to the dignity of human nature, and to the equity of the divine dealings with mankind, to suppose that virtue is to be practised for virtue's sake, and vice to be abhorred for its intrinsic deformity, than that we should be led to shun the one, and to practise the other, from the *servile* dread of *punishment*, or the *mercenary* hope of *reward*. They will further contend (if baffled in this argument) that, even allowing the sanction of rewards and punishments to be the proper *motive*, and the authority of the Divine will the proper *obligation*, of moral virtue, still the proof of moral duties from their expediency, fitness, or the like, is, in effect, a proof of their *Divine authority;* because God himself is necessarily guided by these considerations, and not by an arbitrary ex-

ercise of his will. Nay, they will insist that there is an antecedent and eternal necessity for these principles of moral duty, independent of the will of the Creator; by which he himself is *bound* or *obliged* to act; and which, consequently, is to us a sufficient evidence of their authority, without reference to any declared communication of his will.

It is exceedingly important to examine the foundations on which these opinions rest: and, perhaps, it may appear, that (notwithstanding the great authorities by which they are supported) they are sophistical and delusive.

First, as to the dignity of human nature, and the supposed unworthiness of acting on the belief of rewards and punishments, rather than on a philosophical admiration of the excellency of virtue and an abhorrence of the turpitude of vice; the whole dispute turns on this question,—whether we be *independent* creatures, or not? Although we exalt ourselves to the utmost possible height in our own estimation; yet if we are really *dependent* on God, (which it may be presumed no true Deist will deny) we only expose our littleness, as well as our presumption, in overlooking that dependence. Supposing also the certainty of a future state, how is it possible to separate the *obligations* of morality from its *consequences;* or to satisfy ourselves and be at ease in our minds, merely from a consciousness of having conformed to *our own* notions of rectitude, without reference to what God requires of us as the condition of obtaining his favour? This seems

to be impossible, where a belief in a future state of retribution has taken firm hold upon the mind. Whatever, therefore, some philosophical declaimers may have advanced respecting the meanness and servility of looking to a "recompense of reward" for our actions, it is unnatural and irrational *not* to act on such a principle: nay, it must be an offence to our Creator not to "have respect unto it;" unless it can be proved that God, when he had created man, left him to follow his own imaginations, and to seek for other motives and obligations to virtue than those of the fear and love of Him and of obedience to his commands.

To the argument of those who admit the *will of God* as the proper basis of morality, but contend that his will may be sufficiently ascertained (or, rather, can *only* be ascertained) by proving the expediency, fitness, or beauty of virtue, because these considerations alone can be supposed to move the Author of our being to prescribe such conduct, — we may answer, that no proofs of this kind can be admitted as sufficiently demonstrative of the Divine will, or as constituting moral obligation in its strict and proper sense; because *obligation* implies the will of a *superior*, which constrains us to obey or to suffer punishment. The most convincing arguments which can be brought to show the reasonableness, expediency, or excellence of whatever kind, attached to moral virtue, do not touch the main point on which the present question depends,

unless they establish, at the same time, its *Divine* authority.

Now, in order to establish this point, some of our most subtle moralists (among whom are many who entertain great reverence for Revelation) argue thus: that there is an antecedent, eternal, and immutable fitness of things, or a necessary relation subsisting between them, which never can be effaced, and from a perception of which arise all our sentiments of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood: that a conformity with these sentiments in our principles and conduct constitutes moral rectitude, and our deviation from them moral obliquity; that there is a consciousness or moral sense within us, respecting these eternal truths, which is intended to be our sure guide in every thing that concerns us as accountable beings; and that God himself has clearly manifested his approbation of virtue and his disapprobation of vice, by enduing us with such a moral sense of good and evil as is here described.

But how is this antecedent and eternal fitness of things to be considered as a certain criterion of moral obligation, or as superseding all other evidence of the Divine will? Who made, or ordained it, but God himself? How, then, can it be regarded as *antecedent* to his will? And if it be *not* antecedent to his will, what evidence can the proof of such a fitness of things afford of moral right or wrong, *independent* of his will? Are our perceptions, or natural notions, of good and evil (if such we have) so certain and infallible as to raise us above the possibility

of being further enlightened by Divine communications? If so, then human reason is the sole measure of truth, and the moral sense an instinct which will guide us unerringly; or, in other words, man is a god unto himself, and needeth not to "give account of any of his matters;" nor can he be made wiser or better, except by the cultivation and improvement of his own natural faculties;—a position, which, however it may accord with the sentiments of the vain and superficial theorists of the age, savours hardly less of ignorance than of impiety.

But, in order to gloss over this absurdity, it has been contended that these supposed eternal relations and fitnesses are as binding upon God himself, (with reverence be it spoken) as they are upon his *creatures;* or, to speak in less offensive language, that because they are the *necessary* rule of *his* conduct, therefore he prescribes them as the rule of *ours.* This is a favourite topic with the advocates of natural religion; with most of whom it seems to be the object, by every possible mode of argument, to prove that we are left to the guidance of *Nature,* and that God never interposes to instruct us in any other way. Some, however, whose attachment to the cause of revealed religion we cannot possibly call in question, urge the same doctrine. Thus, one of the profoundest moralists and most sincere Christians of the last century affirms, that "no commands whatsoever do make any thing morally good and evil, just and unjust, which *Nature* had not

made such before."*—But (with all due deference to so highly respectable an authority) may we not be permitted to ask what is here meant by *Nature?* or in what sense Nature can possibly be understood as *antecedent* to the God of Nature? If the term Nature signify God himself, then, indeed, we readily grant that nothing is good or evil, just or unjust, true or false, which *he* hath not made such: but that seems to be the very thing which too many moralists who have recourse to this argument labour to disprove. Again, says the same author†, "the liberty of commanding is circumscribed within certain bounds and limits; so that if *any commander* go beyond the sphere and bounds that Nature sets him, his commands will not oblige."—The words "*any commander*" seem intended to include the *Divine* Lawgiver himself, as well as *human* legislators. But is it possible that the Almighty can *go beyond the sphere of his nature?* What is that nature which can set bounds to *him?* Or who will presume to say that any Divine command will not *oblige* us, in the fullest sense of moral obligation, although we may be altogether unable to discern its eternal relation and fitness? This, indeed, is a radical and insuperable objection to all theories of morals, considered as independent of the *revealed* will of God, that they suppose us capable of *discerning* and fully *comprehending* those eternal fitnesses and relations, which, as they originated in the will

* Dr. Cudworth's Treatise concerning Morality, p. 24.

† Page 24.

of the Creator, and are subject to his will, can only be fully known by him, and are discernible by *others* in such measure only as *he* shall see fit to disclose them.

It should seem, however, that some have been led to adopt these theories, from a pious desire of removing from the Creator the imputation of caprice or arbitrary proceedings, by showing that even he himself is bound by the same laws which bind his creatures, and that he cannot depart from them. But will not a just sentiment of reverence towards the Creator rather lead us to acquiesce in the general belief that whatever he wills must be consonant with rectitude and fitness, than to attempt to discover particular laws of rectitude and fitness anterior to his will, and to regard him as bound by them to such conduct as *we* deem befitting his divine perfections? On what principle, indeed, can we admit the supposition of God's imposing laws upon mankind which may be repugnant to eternal rectitude? For, who made this eternal rectitude but God himself? What but his will ordained to all creatures the course that they are to pursue? Where, then, is the necessity for seeking any *higher* obligation in morals than the will of him who is the Author of that very nature, which is thus set, as it were, in competition with its Creator, and regarded as of paramount obligation on him, as well as on ourselves?

But farther, it deserves to be remarked, that as this relation or fitness of things can be neither antecedent to nor independent of the Divine will: so neither is

it, strictly speaking, *immutable;* since God may change it whenever he sees fit. He may change the relations that subsist between particular persons or things; and, consequently, may change the obligations and duties respecting them. The relation between man and his Maker, as well as between man and the inferior creatures, was changed on the *fall* of man. Considered with reference to the Redeemer, who was then first revealed to him, a great change took place in man's moral obligations; insomuch that the several duties which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves, cannot now be fully and clearly ascertained, without previously knowing in what relation we stand to our Redeemer and Sanctifier, as well as to our Creator. Thus much must be acknowledged by every *believer* of the Gospel: and the *unbeliever* cannot prove the contrary, unless he be able to demonstrate *à priori* that man is not in a fallen state, and that there is no Redeemer or Sanctifier to whom he owes any moral obligation.

To these considerations may also be added (as, perhaps, decisive of the question), that unless it can be proved that God has impressed upon us *innate ideas* of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong, it will be to no purpose to contend for a rule of conduct which no human intellect can possibly discover or demonstrate purely by its own *natural* powers, for want of axioms or data on which to ground its propositions. Unless, therefore, we consider *Divine instruction* as the basis of all our knowledge in *moral* truths as well as in truths *divine* (with which moral truths are,

indeed, inseparably connected), we shall never be able to frame a theory of ethics free from innumerable objections.

Here again, as in the former instance, we might make our appeal to ancient times for testimony of the defectiveness of all moral systems framed without a competent knowledge of the will of God. The manifold imperfections of the purest systems of heathen ethics, as well as the doubts and disagreements of the ablest teachers of moral philosophy before the promulgation of Christianity, fully confirm all that has been advanced on this subject, and show the utter insufficiency of the light of nature as a guide to moral perfection.

Thus far have we proceeded, in endeavouring to prove that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," whenever it affects to be independent of him, or to frame religious systems without a knowledge of his revealed will. If the arguments brought to establish this position be valid, we are enabled to give a decisive answer to all those objections against revealed religion which proceed on the supposition of the competency of human reason to guide us to a knowledge of those truths on which depends our happiness as beings destined to life and immortality: and of such a nature, perhaps, are all the objections which have been adduced from reasoning *à priori* against the Christian Revelation. To those who are content that we should die like the brutes that perish, it may seem sufficient to attain to no more knowledge on spiritual subjects than brutes themselves

can reach. With *them*, nothing will be deemed important which looks beyond the present world. But such is not the hope of a rational creature; nor will it be the *end* of any human being, whatever may be the persuasion of perverse and incredulous men. For something else, therefore, it behoves us to provide: and if reason, unenlightened by Revelation, be unable to carry us beyond the dreary scene of mortality, what remains but that we lift up our eyes to Him "who dwelleth in the heavens," and gratefully receive whatever communications he may vouchsafe to make to us? While we "lean upon our own understandings," and search for divine truths only by the help of human science, "we wait for light, but, behold, obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness; we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us."*—Blessed be God! then, that we are not left to ourselves, nor to the feeble aid which our own natural faculties can supply; but that "the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace!"†

* Isaiah, lix. 9. 11. † Luke, i. 78, 79.

JOSEPH WHITE, D. D.

LATE REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, AND ARCHBISHOP LAUD'S PROFESSOR OF ARABIC.

From his "*Sermons preached before the University of Oxford, in the Year* 1784, *at the Lecture founded by the Rev. John Bampton, M. A., late Canon of Salisbury,* 1811." 8vo. A new edition.

Of all the Sermons preached in this, or in any other country, THESE are perhaps the most celebrated; or, if this observation require qualification, the only exception may be in favour of those of the *Petit Carême* of MASILLON. For three successive terms, the church of St. Mary's, at Oxford, was crowded with an auditory breathless in admiration of the splendour of diction and vividness of imagery manifested in these Discourses. The subject treated of—"*A Comparison of Mahometanism and Christianity in their History, their Evidence, and their Effects,*"—was new and striking in the pulpit of the University Church. A great deal of highly wrought expectation, from more than a whisper spread abroad of the sources whence the chief materials had been derived, preceded their publicity; and the preacher, although by no means remarkable for elegance of manner, or ductility and melody of voice, applied his whole energies to the task of giving power and effect to his delivery. He succeeded, greatly beyond his own expectations; and the

University rung with his praises. The fame which ensued was merited; for the Public, till then satisfied with the tame polish and cold invective of Blair, became delighted by the union of such harmony of language, skilfulness of argument, and singularity of research, as were blended in these Lectures. Yet it may be questioned, not only whether a display of similar talent would *now* receive the like applause, but whether many subsequent courses of Bampton Lectures have not rendered a more essential service to Christianity.

But, extraordinary as was the result of the *preaching* of these Bampton Lectures, perhaps a more extraordinary history belongs to their *composition;* and posterity will learn, with wonder, and perhaps with mingled pity and contempt, that the measures resorted to by the Laudian Professor of Arabic, in order to impose upon his best friend and most able coadjutor, Dr. Parr, form such a tissue of petty artifice and intrigue as scarcely to be believed. The whole plot, however, is minutely and masterly developed in Dr. Johnstone's *Life of Dr. Parr*, vol. i. p. 216—281., to which I refer the curious Reader for some very singular particulars. The facts, as there delineated, are simply these. A secret correspondence was carried on between Professor White and Mr. Badcock, a dissenting minister of Devonshire, who furnished the greater part of the materials of these Lectures; which materials, copied out by Professor White, with a few emendations and additions, were sent to Dr. Parr as the exclusive composition of the Professor. Several of the Lectures are wholly Badcock's, by the express admission of Dr. White; and the undeniable evidence of a douceur of 500*l.* from the Professor to Mr. Badcock, is a sufficiently solid proof of the value in which the former held the labours of the latter. There could be no violation of any great moral feeling in the transaction thus simply considered; for the labourer was worthy of his hire: but the evasive subtleties and shuffling subterfuges by which the literary intercourse was stubbornly denied, and attempted to be set aside, by Professor White, is matter of perfect astonishment!

In the mean while, Dr. Parr steadily continued his critical labours, believing that the Professor sought no *aid* but his *own*. He revised, added, and polished at his entire discretion; and while it is allowed that *one fifth*, at least, of these Lectures are the work of his learned hand, he undoubtedly gave to the *whole* its last and most effectual polish. The history which belongs to his discovery of the collateral aid of Badcock, is curious and amusing; but can have no place here. It does great credit to the head and heart of Dr. Parr. Thus the Reader will observe that no small interest is attached to the volume from which the ensuing extracts are made; a volume, full, doubtless, of extensive and learned research, and exhibiting a style remarkable alike for its consummate art and harmonious copiousness.

CHARACTER OF CHRIST CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF MAHOMET.

2 Cor. iv. 10.

That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest.

Having before viewed the life and character of Mahomet*. let us now turn our eyes to a brighter picture; where every grace that can recommend religion, and every virtue that can adorn humanity, are so blended as to excite our admiration, and engage our love. Independently, indeed, of all comparison, the character of Jesus Christ stands forward as the most striking and illustrious representation of "whatever things are true, or just, or of good report;" and claims our praise by its own intrinsic excellence.

In the life of our blessed Lord we discover nothing that can either create suspicion, or excite aversion: we see a thousand excellences which the hardiest enemies of the Gospel are compelled involuntarily to approve. All that negative virtue can secure, and all that positive merit can attain, appear to have been united with equal lustre in this lovely and venerable pattern of Christian imitation.

But before I descend to the particulars which it

* "A Comparison of Mahometanism and Christianity in their History, their Evidence, and their Effects."

may be necessary to bring forward in contrasting the life of Christ with that of Mahomet, I beg your permission to introduce some interesting, and, I hope, not impertinent reflections on the nature of that historical form in which the Christian Revelation has been transmitted to us.

This form involves the correctness of system without its abstruseness, and the energy of eloquence without its ostentation. It happily unites the brightness of example with the precision and perspicuity of precept. To the minuteness of detail which belongs to biography, it adds much of that regular arrangement, and of that vivid colouring, by which the more eminent writers of poetry have endeavoured to mark the distinguishing and appropriate qualities of their favourite heroes. Instead of sometimes amusing, and sometimes astonishing us, with those brilliant but indistinct and fleeting impressions which are excited by general descriptions, or elaborate panegyric, it leads us through a series of uniform and characteristic actions, into a clear and full knowledge of the agent. It enables and gently impels the mind to combine, by its own operation, all the detached instances of virtue into one bright assemblage. It transports the imagination, as it were, into the presence of the person whose excellences are recorded, and gives all the finer sensibilities of the soul an immediate and warm interest in every word and every action. Hence, the manner in which the sacred writers have described the actions of Christ, not only increases the efficacy of his instruc-

tions, but constitutes a new, a striking, and peculiar species of evidence for the truth of his religion.

This position it may be of use for us to illustrate yet further.

To compare the character of Socrates with that of Christ, is foreign to our present purpose: but of the manner in which their lives have been respectively written, we may properly take some notice. On the history of Socrates, then, have been employed the exquisite taste of Xenophon, and the sublime genius of Plato. The virtues of this extraordinary man are selected by them as the noblest subject for the fullest display and most active exertion of their talents; and they have brought to the task not merely the sagacity of philosophers, but the affection of friends, and the zeal of enthusiasts.

Now the different style of their writings, and the different tempers as well as capacities of the writers themselves, have produced some variety both in the scenes in which they have exhibited their master, and in the opinions which they have ascribed to him. But, in the composition of each, Socrates is distinguished by a noble contempt of popular prejudice, and perverted science; by an ardent admiration and steady pursuit of virtue; by an anxious concern for the moral improvement of his hearers; and by an heroic superiority to the pleasures of life, and to the terrors of impending death. What his illustrious biographers have performed in such a manner as to engage the attention and excite the admiration of successive ages, has been accomplished with yet

greater success by the sacred writers. They have attained the same end under heavier difficulties, and by the aid of means which, if they are considered as merely human, must surely be deemed inadequate to the task which they undertook. They were by no means distinguished by literary attainments, or by intellectual powers. Their education could not bestow on them very exalted or correct ideas of morality; and their writings were destitute of every recommendation from the artificial ornaments of style. Yet have these four unlearned men effected, by their artless simplicity, a work to which the talents of the two greatest writers of antiquity were not more than equal.

They have exhibited a character far more lovely in itself, and far more venerable, than fiction has ever painted; and in their mode of exhibiting it, they surpass the fidelity, the distinctness, and precision, which two of the most celebrated writers have been able to preserve, when exerting the whole powers of their genius, and actuated by the fondest attachment, they were endeavouring to do justice to the noblest pattern of real virtue of which antiquity can boast. In Jesus have the Evangelists described brighter and more numerous virtues, than Socrates is said even by his professed admirers to have possessed. In their descriptions they have, without effort, and under the influence, it must be allowed, of sincere conviction only, maintained a greater uniformity than the most prejudiced reader can discover in the beautiful compositions of Plato and Xenophon.

If the desire of communicating their own favourite opinions, or the mutual jealousy of literary fame, be assigned as a reason for the diversity of representation in the two Greek writers, we allow the probability of both suppositions: but we contend, that each of these motives is inconsistent with that love of truth, which is necessary to establish the credibility of a biographer. We also contend, that the Evangelists were really possessed of this excellent quality; that they never deviated from it, in order to indulge their enmity or envy; and that, with apparent marks of difference in their language, their dispositions, and, perhaps, in their abilities, they have yet exhibited the character of Christ the most striking, if their narratives be separately considered; and the most consistent, if they be compared with each other. Be it observed too, that the difficulty of preserving that consistence increases both with the peculiarity and magnitude of the excellencies described, and with the number of the persons who undertake the office of describing them.

If it be said, that the superior pretensions of Christ, as a divine teacher, required more splendid virtues than what are expected from Socrates, who taught morality upon principles of human reason only; whence is it that the unpolished, uncultivated minds of the Evangelists should even conceive a more magnificent character than the imaginations of a Plato, or a Xenophon? What aids did they apparently possess for representing it more advantageously? That those four unlettered men should

have drawn such a character, with more uniformity in the whole, and with more sublimity in the parts, is therefore a fact which can be accounted for only, by admitting the constant and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, the real existence of Christ's perfections, and the strong and lasting impression they made upon those who conversed with him. Those perfections themselves were, indeed, extraordinary both in kind and in degree. In their kind they are admirable patterns for the conduct of Christ's followers; and in their degree, they are eminently and indisputably proportioned to the transcendent and unrivalled dignity of his own mission.

Every reader of discernment is disgusted at the fictitious representation of "those faultless monsters which the world ne'er saw:" every writer of taste finds it necessary to procure credit to his representations, by throwing some shades of error and infirmity over the wisest and best of men: every impartial and profound enquirer into the constitution of the human mind is aware that the ruling passion, by which the most amiable and venerable of men are distinguished, sometimes degenerates into excess; that the indiscriminate and eager pursuit of virtue itself imperceptibly leads into vice; that the most illustrious characters are distinguished by some predominant excellence; that he who surpasses his fellow-creatures in some instances, falls below them in others; and that, among the sons of men, no one has yet existed in whom every great and good qua-

lity, every religious and social perfection, have been at once united.

To these incontrovertible and general rules, the life of Christ affords one glorious exception. There is a variety in his virtues, which never shocks probability; and at the same time there is an uniformity, which never creates satiety. Upon the most common actions he bestows a novelty in his manner of performing them: the uncommon he recommends by a simplicity, which adds to their charms, without degrading their dignity.

Here, indeed, it becomes me to observe, that in all his actions he, without any appearance of design, preserves that decorum which the ancient philosophers have explained with so much ingenuity, and which is utterly beyond the reach of affectation or imposture. In abstaining from licentious pleasures, he was equally free from ostentatious singularity, and churlish sullenness. In partaking, as he sometimes did, of the innocent enjoyments of life, he never fell into the gaiety of the Epicurean; in relinquishing them, when the great ends of his mission required it, he was equally free from the assumed and unnatural insensibility of the Stoic. When he complied with the established ceremonies of his countrymen, that compliance was not accompanied by any marks of bigotry or superstition; when he opposed their rooted prepossessions, his opposition was perfectly exempt from the captious petulance of a controversialist, and the undistinguishing zeal of an innovator.

It is well known, that some virtues owe much of their lustre to local and temporary circumstances; and that the same actions which may be highly, nay, even justly, extolled in one age or country, are in others surveyed with listless indifference. "In antiquity," says an acute observer*, "the heroes of philosophy, as well as those of war and patriotism, have a grandeur and force of sentiment which astonishes our narrow souls, and is rashly considered as extravagant and supernatural. They, in their turn, I allow, would have equal reason to consider as romantic and incredible the degree of humanity, clemency, order, tranquillity, and other social virtues, to which in the administration of government we have attained in modern times, had any one been then alive to have made a fair representation of them."

The life of Christ blends these opposite and seemingly irreconcilable excellences. It avoids their extravagance, and supplies their defects. The courage of our Lord was active in encountering the dangers to which he was exposed, and passive under the aggravated calamities which the malice of his foes heaped upon him. Yet his fortitude was remote from every appearance of rashness; and his patience was equally exempt from abject pusillanimity and stupid apathy. He was firm without obstinacy, and humble without meanness. In the general tenour of his life he was mild and gentle; the promoter of peace amongst other men, and the

* Hume's Essays.

strictest observer of it in his own behaviour. But when great and real occasions called for different deportment, he displayed a nobleness of mind, a contempt of danger and death, such as the importance of his mission required from him, and such as the consciousness of rectitude could alone inspire.

To the virtues of Christ, whether we consider them as too sublime to excite any sentiments of presumptuous emulation, or too rational not to justify our endeavours to imitate them; whether we examine his private or his public conduct; may, in a nobler sense, be applied the beautiful and animated language, in which a celebrated orator of antiquity has extolled those arts by which he was himself distinguished: "Adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur."

Those virtues, indeed, will in no age and no country lose either their usefulness, their beauty, or their merit. They are in various degrees practicable; under every form of government, whether free or despotic, whether barbarous or refined; and in every state of knowledge, whether it be imperfect or improved. In the lowest condition of the world, they tend to lessen the miseries and disorders to which the unsearchable providence of God has subjected our species: they will increase the stock of our happiness, and exalt our nature to the highest perfection, when accompanied by every assistance

which reason, which philosophy and civilisation, can bestow, in forming the moral or the religious character of man.

These observations will, I trust, both elucidate and justify the biographical form in which Revelation is conveyed to us. God, it is true, might have made known to us his will by a series of laws, by abstract reasonings, by short instructive sentences, by copious and regular systems, or by any of the various modes of human composition. But Christianity aims at a nobler end, and pursues it by the most proper and efficacious methods. We read, indeed, the opinions and the belief of Socrates, and the commands and promises of Mahomet. But by Jesus Christ, virtue, of every kind and in every degree, is exemplified as well as taught. He is the pattern as well as the teacher of the duties we are to perform. His precepts show us what we ought to practise; his conduct convinces us that it is practicable; and the rewards which he has offered are powerful incentives to us to practise it from the best motives, and in the best manner. His resurrection from the grave confirms our faith; his ascension to glory animates our hopes; the actions of his life, and the circumstances of his death, enlarge and invigorate our charity. By these means all the parts of Christianity form one great and consistent whole: every moral rule is realised, and becomes a proof of religious truth; whilst every religious truth, in its turn, illustrates and enforces every moral rule. The actions of God himself are,

indeed, invisible; those of men are imperfect; but the actions of Christ (considered in his human character) are both visible and perfect: they are level to our apprehensions, and most worthy of our imitation.

Religion is thus made intelligible to all, because all are bound to obey it. It is accompanied by a species of demonstration, which the meanest cannot misunderstand; it is recommended by such an instance of its beauty and its usefulness, as is calculated to remove every scruple, and to silence every objection.

To evince the justness of these general observations, I shall now enter more particularly upon that comparison between the character of Christ and that of Mahomet, to which I am led by the subject of these Lectures.

The situation and manners of the Jews at the time when our Lord entered upon his public ministry, and the opposition to the Gospel to which they gave birth, have already been the subject of our consideration. We have seen, that of the many false and mistaken notions which then prevailed among that blind and deluded people, the expectation of a temporal Messiah was the most extensive and most important. Impatient under the galling yoke of servitude, and blindly attached to an opinion, which was at once supported by national pride, and in appearance founded on the literal and express authority of Divine revelation; the people in general, and the vulgar in particular, were eager to

admit, and zealous to defend, the claims of every pretender to this splendid character. The peculiar nature and wide-spread influence of this prejudice offered the most favourable opportunity, and presented the fairest prospect of temporal authority and dominion, which could have been desired by the most sanguine and ambitious impostor. But of this opportunity no advantage was taken by Jesus Christ. The plan which he pursued was in every respect the reverse of what an interested deceiver would have concerted, whose hopes of success were founded only in the machinations of human policy.

His first public appearance was in the highest degree unpopular, and opposed to all the prejudices and all the pride of his countrymen. Instead of alluring them by the prospect of temporal dominion, to which their hopes and expectations universally pointed, he proclaimed the commencement of a spiritual and invisible kingdom, little calculated to attract the attention of a people, who had never been accustomed to raise their views beyond the objects of sense; and totally inconsistent with every opinion which had been transmitted to them by tradition, and sanctified among them by authority. Instead of erecting his victorious standard as the glorious Redeemer of Israel, their mighty deliverer from the disgraceful bondage of Roman oppression, and from the power of every earthly foe; he offered them a redemption, more beneficial indeed, though less attractive to the sensual mind,—a redemption from the dreadful tyranny of death. He invited

them to a deliverance greater in itself, though less consonant to their wishes, than exemption from servitude to the Roman power, — a deliverance from the yet severer and more ignominious slavery of sin.

Had interest, or ambition, been the guide of his actions, he would certainly have assumed that character, to which the warmest hopes and the most rooted prepossessions of the Jews universally inclined. He would not have opposed alike the pride of princes, and the superstition of the people; he would have either courted popularity, or grasped at dominion; he, at least, would not have taken every measure that had a natural tendency to alarm the jealousy of the magistrate, and to provoke the displeasure of the multitude.

As ambition had no share in his claims, as his kingdom was neither formed on the policy nor supported by the power of the world, he sought not its favour, nor shrunk from its displeasure. Instead of labouring to increase the number of his followers, by an insinuating flexibility in his own manners, or by a corrupt compliance with their prejudices, he gave offence by the unaffected plainness of the one, and by an undisguised opposition to the other. He disdained to conciliate the affections of any class of men, however dignified by their station, or formidable for their power, by any base or dishonourable concessions: he did not endeavour to win even their assent by a servile or a treacherous accommodation of his doctrines to their follies or their vices. At the same time he opposed those vices, not with the

indiscriminate rage of a blind enthusiast, but with the steady resolution of a wise and upright mind, that mixed zeal with knowledge, and added conviction to authority. Even by the confession of his enemies*, "he was true, and taught the way of God in truth, neither cared he for any man: for he regarded not the persons of men."

A conduct like this was utterly inconsistent with the intricate wiles of policy, or the aspiring views of ambition. Far from engaging in the pursuit of secular power and authority, the blessed Jesus repeatedly and peremptorily rejected them when offered to his hands. He disclaimed the office of a ruler or a judge; he even fled from the infatuated multitude, who acknowledged him for their king, and would have exalted him to a throne.

The impostor of Arabia seized the sceptre, before it was offered to him; the dictator of Rome rejected a crown, which it was both unsafe and dishonourable for him to wear; and was conscious, that he had already obtained the solid power of monarchy, while he reluctantly, though ostentatiously, refused its gaudy appendages. But far different was the conduct of Jesus Christ. He declined as well the reality of dominion which Cæsar possessed, as the appearance of it which Mahomet assumed. He declined them, at a time when by accepting them he might have gratified the pride of his countrymen, subdued all the prejudices which obstructed the

* Matt. xxii. 16.

belief of his mission, and averted many of the dangers which threatened his life.

Those mistaken views of temporal grandeur which the disciples had indulged, their Master industriously corrected: he sought on every occasion to humble their pride, to draw off their attention from the things of this world, and to fix them on those above.

Men, who set no value on any interests but those which were connected with honour, wealth, and pleasure, contemned the humility of his appearance, and derided the plainness of his preaching. Their pride disdained all association with a person ignobly born, who pursued no measures to exalt himself above the common rank of life. Hence, with an immediate view to that humble appearance which he condescended to assume on earth, the prophet Isaiah thus beautifully delineates his character: "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form, nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not."*

Even his numerous and stupendous miracles were not wrought through ostentation, or with any view to serve the purposes of human glory. On the contrary, they were acts of the purest and most disinterested benevolence. They have a kind of ethical

* Isaiah, liii. 2, 3.

excellence, a close and striking conformity to the peculiar temper, as well as the distinguishing and important mission, of him by whom they were performed.

He often enjoined the strictest secresy to those who were spectators of these mighty works; lest he should appear to affect more than to deserve the high character he sustained. "Go thy way, tell no man*," was his frequent command to those whom he had rescued from the sharp anguish of disease, the gloomy horrors of blindness, or the agonising distractions of demoniac frenzy.

From a similar principle arose his condescension in admitting little children to his arms, in blessing them, and recommending them to the protection of his heavenly Father, and to the tender affection of his disciples. From the same principle, he vouchsafed to wash his disciples' feet; and by so amiable an instance of humility inculcated this gracious lesson, that no office of benevolent assistance should be thought contemptible, or unworthy even the dignity of the most exalted character, if thereby a friend may be relieved in pain, or a fellow-creature extricated from distress.

Now if his humility had been only affected, in order to cover designs of which ambition was the hidden motive, there would have been some unguarded moment when the mask would have dropped off. But the whole life of our blessed Lord, in all its vicissitudes, is marked by the same calm indiffer-

* Matt. viii. 4. Mark, viii. 26. Luke, viii. 56.

ence to worldly honours, the same manly disregard of popular applause, the same exemption from the impatience of desire when pre-eminence was offered to him, and from the anguish of disappointment when it was refused.

As the conduct of Christ was not actuated by ambition, so neither was it influenced by any other base and inordinate passion. He did not make his doctrine subservient to the gratification of any darling lusts and corrupt affections in himself, or his disciples: on the contrary, he constantly enjoined the practice of the purest, the strictest, and the most refined chastity; not only in outward actions, but even in the inward imaginations of the heart. He boasted of no exclusive privileges, nor claimed any invidious exemptions from the laws which he had prescribed to others. He allowed no licentiousness under the pretence of religion; and transgressed no rules of decency or rectitude, under the arrogated sanction of the Divinity.

Though possessed of the most unbounded power, we behold him living continually in a state of voluntary humiliation and poverty; we see him daily exposed to almost every species of want and distress; afflicted without a comforter, persecuted without a protector; and wandering about, according to his own pathetic complaint, because he *had not where to lay his head.*

Though regardless of the pleasures, and sometimes destitute of the comforts, of life, he never provokes our disgust, by the sourness of the misanthrope; or

our contempt, by the inactivity of the recluse. He never affected gloomy austerity; nor sought to be sequestered from the world, in order to preserve the spirituality of his mind. But his ministry was professedly, and really, destined to active employment; and engaged in promoting the noblest interests of mankind. He, therefore, freely mixed with them in all the habits of social intercourse: and in those moments, when all the avenues of the heart are open to gaiety and affection, he silently instructed his companions in the rare but exquisite art of being cheerful without levity, and of uniting solid improvement with harmless entertainment. Socrates conversed freely with the impious and the licentious, for the sake of correcting more effectually their errors, and restraining their vices; but his reasonings are sometimes unnecessarily abstruse, sometimes paradoxical, and very often indecisive: and in his behaviour instances may be found where his gaiety degenerates into buffoonery and his irony into bitter and indecent sarcasm. Jesus deigned to associate with publicans and sinners: but he always preserved an exact decorum in word and deed; and even in his most familiar conversations he steadily kept in view the momentous end for which he came into the world.

His attention to their welfare was evidenced not only by his salutary injunctions, which breathed the full and genuine spirit of compassion and love; but by his readiness to embrace every opportunity of relieving their distresses, and administering to their

wants. He was, therefore, in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense, "eyes to the blind; feet was he to the lame; and the blessings of them that were ready to perish came upon him."* In every period and circumstance of his life we thus behold dignity and elevation blended with love and pity: something, which, though it awakens our admiration, yet attracts our confidence. We see power; but it is a power which is rather our security than our dread; a power softened by tenderness, and soothing, while it awes.

And yet, with all the gentleness of a meek and lowly mind, we behold an heroic firmness, which no terrors could shake, and no opposition could restrain. This union of opposite qualities constitutes, indeed, the distinguishing beauty of his character. It presents us, as it were, with the lights and shades, which, mixed in due proportion, contribute to the finishing of the picture. Had his actions been governed only by the soft and yielding influences of gentleness and compassion, he never could have completed a work, which called for the most determined efforts of active zeal and fortitude. Besides this deficiency in point of positive exertion, his conduct, if wholly guided by the gentler principles of the human heart, would have subjected him to the suspicion of a blind and irrational impulse: it would have been imputed to a complexional felicity of temper, a mere instinctive benevolence; which, having no moral motive, could be entitled to no praise; and which, being destitute of a steady principle, would prove of little

* Job, xxix. 15, 13.

benefit to mankind. The conduct of our blessed Lord was, therefore, guided by reason as well as by affection; and was distinguished as much by an heroic zeal for the truth, and an unrelenting opposition to the errors and wickedness of the times, as by the gentler qualities of meekness, compassion, and forbearance.

That the character sustained by our Lord was not assumed, that he was in reality and truth what he appeared to be, is evident from the perfect consistency of his conduct.

In the exemplary uniformity of Cato's behaviour, we see the cause of that splendid panegyric which the historian has bestowed on him: "Esse, quam videri, bonus malebat."* Now, on this very principle we assert the sincerity of Christ; because, in every period of his history, we find that he never swerves from moral rectitude, nor sinks below the dignity of his religious character. In the private scenes of life, and in the public occupations of his ministry; whether the object of admiration or of ridicule, of love or of persecution; whether welcomed with hosannas, or insulted with anathemas; we still see him pursuing with unwearied constancy the same end, and preserving the same integrity of life and manners.

To exemplify these extraordinary qualities and virtues in the actions of that life which they adorned, is a task from which I retire with awful diffidence.

Some of the brightest characters which poetry

* Sallust. Bell. Catil.

has feigned, or history has recorded, become more pleasing and more interesting to us from the contrast of their weaknesses and excellences in different situations, or from the mixture of both in the same action. But the life of Christ has none of those inequalities, which it is the delight of the orator to paint, and of the philosopher to analyse. The natural and unaffected deportment which he invariably preserved, without painful exertion, and without insidious design; the consistence between each particular action and each particular situation; the conformity of all his actions to one common rule, the word of God; and their tendency to one common end, the salvation of mankind; may be explored by the profound moralist, must be admired by the pious believer, but cannot be described, surely, without a portion of that matchless simplicity with which they are recorded by the inspired Evangelists. Too plain for ornament, and too grand for illustration, the character of Jesus leaves at a distance the powers of language. Surrounded with the meanest circumstances, and at the same time distinguished by the most important and astonishing events, it seems to baffle equally by its humility, and its majesty, all the feeble efforts of human eloquence.

The birth of our Saviour, placed in the lowliest scene of poverty, was first announced to the shepherds, watching their flocks: but the message was brought by an angel, and a multitude of the heavenly host. Though he was laid in a manger in despised

Bethlehem, the Magi of the East were conducted by a star to visit the humble spot. Sprung, as he was, from the meanest origin, and educated in the meanest occupation; yet to him was committed the care of immortal souls, and the salvation of a corrupt and deluded world. His associates he had called from the poorest and most ignorant of the people: them, however, did he commission to publish the doctrines of faith; and on them the Holy Ghost descended. Though a friendless wanderer, in his own country an exile and an outcast, he was distinguished whithersoever he went by signs and miracles. Even in his last hour, when he was numbered with malefactors on the cross, the darkness which overspread the land, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, and all the convulsions, as it were, of sympathising nature, gave tokens of the Son of God.

Considered then in all its circumstances, the history of Christ shrinks not from comparison with the most partial and lofty representation of the prophet of Arabia.

Of both we find, that the earlier part of life, before the publication of their respective missions, passed away in silence, private and undistinguished. The first years of Mahomet were busied in the cares of merchandise; till, returning to his native city, he devoted to solitude and retirement the leisure which his opulence had procured. The youth of Jesus was spent in domestic privacy, and was remarkable only for affectionate and dutiful

submission to his parents; unless, indeed, when in the Temple he, by his ready answers to the questions of the Rabbins, and his skilful exposition of the Scriptures, astonished those that heard him, and gave an omen of his future greatness.

The designs of Mahomet were gradually and cautiously unfolded; and, in order to prepare the minds of his countrymen for the reception of his faith, he first artfully persuaded his own relations and domestics, and drew to his side the most powerful of his neighbours.

Jesus walked forth by the sea of Galilee, and saw fishers casting their nets. These were his first converts and disciples. Though they were destitute of riches and of power, he found in them what his ministry required, an honest and a willing spirit. He won them neither by subtle arguments, nor crafty persuasions; but bade them forsake their nets and follow him, to see his humble dwelling, to hear his heavenly discourses to the people, and witness the wonders he was going to perform.

Jesus called his hearers to repentance, but Mahomet to conquest.

At their first appearance they were both compelled to avoid the rage of the multitude, who would have destroyed them: but Mahomet escaped by a secret, ignominious flight, and Jesus by a public miracle.

The revelation of the Arabian prophet was inconsistent; a system of contradiction, continually shift-

ing with the views of his policy, and the necessities of his imposture; now looking towards Mecca, and now to Jerusalem. Widely different was the conduct of Christ. He did not seek to accommodate his doctrine to fortuitous changes in his external circumstances; he did not at one time revoke what he had asserted, or contradict what he had enjoined at another. Every part of his teaching was regular and consistent in the objects to which it was directed, and the language in which it was conveyed.

Mahomet allured his followers with the glories of a visible monarchy, and the splendour of temporal dominion. In him we behold the lord of war, and the destroyer of mankind, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands who fell by his desolating sword; laying cities in flames; carrying misery and bloodshed through the earth; and pursued in his victorious career by the lamentations and curses of its inhabitants. In Jesus we see the adorable Prince of Peace, the friend and Saviour of the world, riding meekly to the holy city, hailed with the acclamations and blessings of much people, whom he had rescued from sin and death, wiping the tears from all eyes, and healing every sickness and every disease.

And here the comparison must cease. The events that followed in our Saviour's life are too august to be placed in competition with any mortal power, and can be comprehended only by minds habituated to the contemplation of heavenly objects. Let us consider the passion of our Lord, and the magnificent

scenes of his resurrection and ascension; and then ask, in what part of all the history of Mahometanism any parallel or resemblance can be found? Let us consider the last days of Christ's continuance upon earth, and how does the prophet of Mecca sink in the comparison! Let us in imagination hear and see the blessed Jesus, when he gives his Apostles authority to go forth and baptize all nations, and preach in his name repentance and remission of sins; when he empowers them to cast out evil spirits, to speak with new tongues, and to work wonders; when he holds up to them the promise of the Comforter, and power from on high; and when, having blessed them, he ascends into heaven, where he is for ever seated in glory on the right hand of God.

But chiefly, what raises Christ and his religion far above all the fictions of Mahomet, is that awful alternative of hopes and fears, that looking for of judgment, which our Christian faith sets before us.

At that day, when time, the great arbiter of truth and falsehood, shall bring to pass the accomplishment of the ages, and the Son of God shall make his enemies his footstool, then shall the deluded followers of the great impostor, disappointed of the expected intercession of their prophet, stand trembling and dismayed at the approach of the glorified Messiah.

Then shall they say, "Yonder cometh in the clouds that Jesus, whose religion we laboured to destroy, whose temples we profaned, whose servants and followers we cruelly oppressed! Behold he cometh

but no longer the humble son of Mary, no longer a mere mortal prophet, the equal of Abraham and of Moses, as that deceiver taught us; but the everlasting Son of the everlasting Father! The Judge of mankind! The Sovereign of Angels! The Lord of all things, both in earth and heaven!"

MIRACLES AND PROPHECIES CONFIRMATIVE OF CHRIST'S DIVINITY.

JOHN, x. 25.

Jesus answered, The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

HAVING in my last Discourse endeavoured to expose that empty show of external evidence, by which the Arabian impostor laboured to support his impious pretensions, I now proceed, in pursuance of my general plan, to examine and state the proofs on which Jesus Christ rested his claim to the character of a divine teacher. In the words which I have now read to you, our Lord replies to the captious questions of the Jews concerning his dignity and office; and refers them to the miracles which he wrought, as affording plain and undeniable evidence of his mission.

Every one knows what is meant by a MIRACLE*;

* In judging of MIRACLES, there are certain criteria, peculiar to the subject, sufficient to conduct our enquiries, and warrant our determination. Assuredly they do not appeal to our ignorance; for they presuppose, not only the existence of a general order of things, but our actual knowledge of the appear-

though divines have differed about the precise terms of definition. Some have defined it in language too

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ance that order exhibits, and of the secondary material causes from which it, in most cases, proceeds. If a miraculous event were effected by the immediate hand of God, and yet bore no mark of distinction from the ordinary effects of his agency, it would impress no conviction, and probably awaken no attention.

Our knowledge of the ordinary course of things, though limited, is real; and therefore it is essential to a miracle, both that it differ from that course, and be accompanied with peculiar and unequivocal signs of such difference.

But as the term NATURE is frequently used, and sometimes abused, in the controversy upon this subject, I beg leave to state, in a few words, my own ideas. The course of nature is, we are told, fixed and unalterable, and therefore it is not consistent with the immutability of God to perform miracles. But, surely, they who reason in this manner, beg the point in question. We have no right to assume, that the Deity has ordained such general laws as will exclude his interposition; and we cannot suppose that he would forbear to interfere, where any important end could be answered. This interposition, though it controls, in particular cases, the energy, does not diminish the utility of those laws. It leaves them to fulfil their own proper purposes, and only effects a distinct purpose for which they were not calculated.

Let us, however, ask, what is meant by this stability in the order of Nature? Gravitation is known by experience, and acts according to rules, which repeated observation has enabled us to ascertain: yet Magnetism, of which the rules are doubtless equally fixed, though more imperfectly known, suspends the force of gravitation. Is Nature then uncertain in her operations, or should we not rather say, that in different circumstances her agency is different? Have not both their proper sphere of action, and does it betray any credulity in admitting the evidence

loose and equivocal, and have thus confounded that which is unaccountable with that which is mira-

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of those who have marked their opposite effects? In certain circumstances we may have strong reason to expect, that the one would act rather than the other. But by a competent witness of the fact we should be soon persuaded to believe, that a phenomenon, however extraordinary in itself, and however different from our preconceived opinions, really existed. If the course of nature implies the general laws of matter and motion, into which the most opposite phenomena may be resolved, it is certain, that we do not yet know them in their full extent; and therefore that events, which are related by judicious and disinterested persons, and at the same time imply no gross contradiction, are possible in themselves, and capable of a certain degree of proof.

If the course of nature implies the whole order of events which God has ordained for the government of the world, it includes both his ordinary and extraordinary dispensations; and among them miracles may have their place, as a part of the universal plan. It is, indeed, consistent with sound philosophy, and not inconsistent with pure religion, to acknowledge, that they were disposed by the Supreme Being at the same time with the more ordinary effects of his power; that their causes and occasions were arranged with the same regularity; and that in reference chiefly to their concomitant circumstances of persons and times, to the specific ends for which they were employed, and to our idea of the immediate necessity there is for a divine agent, miracles differ from common events, in which the hand of God acts as efficaciously, though less visibly. On this consideration of the subject, miracles, instead of contradicting nature, form a part of it: and all I object to is, that what our limited reason and scanty experience may comprehend, should be represented as a full and exact view of the possible or actual varieties which exist in the work of God.

Are we then asked, whether miracles be CREDIBLE? We

culous: others, to avoid this extreme, have so narrowed the definition, as to make it inapplicable even

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reply, that, abstractedly considered, they are not totally incredible; that they are capable of indirect proof from analogy, and of direct from testimony; that in the common and daily course of worldly affairs, events, the improbability of which, antecedently to all testimony, was very great, is overcome and destroyed by the authority of competent and honest witnesses; that the Christian miracles were objects of real and proper experience to those who saw them; and that whatsoever the senses of mankind can perceive, their report may substantiate.

Should it be asked, whether miracles were NECESSARY? and whether the end proposed to be effected by them could warrant so immediate and extraordinary an interference of the Almighty, as such extraordinary operations suppose? To this we might answer, that if the fact be established, all reasonings *à priori* concerning the necessity must be frivolous, and may be false. We are not capable of deciding on a question, which, however simple in appearance, is yet too complex in its parts, and too extensive in its object, to be fully comprehended by the human understanding. We know not what event is necessary, or what means are requisite to effect it. Events apparently insignificant are frequently combined with others of the greatest magnitude and importance, and indeed so combined as to be inseparable from them; nay, to have been the conditional causes without which they could not be produced, and even the efficient causes which actually produced them.

Whether God could, or could not, have effected all the ends designed to be promoted by the Gospel, without deviating from the common course of his providence, and interfering with its general laws, is a speculation that a modest enquirer would carefully avoid; for it carries on the very face of it a degree of presumption, totally unbecoming the state of a mortal being. Infinitely safer is it for us to acquiesce in what the Almighty has done than to embarrass our minds with speculations about

to events which are truly entitled to that denomination. I will not attempt to give such a definition

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what he might have done. Enquiries of this kind are generally inconclusive, and always useless. They rest on no solid principles, are conducted by no fixed rules, and lead to no clear conviction. They begin from curiosity or vanity; they are prosecuted amidst ignorance and error; and they frequently terminate in impious presumption or universal scepticism.

He that arraigns the necessity of an extraordinary providence, may in the end question even the existence of an ordinary one: for when the genius of wild and undistinguishing enquiry is once let loose on ground where there are no direct paths, and no settled limits, who can tell whither the extravagant and impetuous spirit may be carried?

God is the best, and indeed the only judge, how far miracles are proper to promote any particular design of his providence: and how far that design would have been left unaccomplished, if common and ordinary methods only had been pursued. So from the absence of miracles we may conclude, in any supposed case, that they were not necessary; from their existence, supported by fair testimony, in any given case, we may infer with confidence that they are proper.

Now we are not only capable of opposing one conjecture to another, and of confronting an objection founded on metaphysical speculations by an answer of the same kind; but we may proceed on grounds yet more solid and satisfactory. A view of the state of the world in general, and of the Jewish nation in particular, and an examination of the nature and tendency of the Christian religion, will point out very clearly the great expediency of a miraculous interposition: and when we reflect on the gracious and important ends that were to be effected by it, we shall be convinced that it was not an idle and useless display of Divine power; but that while the means effected and confirmed the end, the end fully justified and illustrated the means.

as shall be exact, without being defective; and comprehensive, without being redundant. It is

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If we reflect on the almost irresistible force of prejudice and the strong opposition it universally made to the establishment of a new religion on the demolition of rites and ceremonies, which authority had made sacred, and custom had familiarised: if we reflect on the extent and importance, as well as the singularity of the Christian plan; what was its avowed purpose to effect, and what difficulties it was necessarily called to struggle with, before that purpose could be effected; how much it was opposed by the opinions and by the practice of the generality of mankind; by philosophy; by superstition; by corrupt passions, and by inveterate habits; by pride, and sensuality; in short, by every engine of human influence, whether formed by craft, or aided by power; if we seriously reflect on these things, and give them their due force, (and experience shows us that we can scarcely give them too much,) we shall be induced to admit even the necessity of a miraculous interposition, at a time when common means must inevitably, in our apprehensions, have failed of success.

The revelation of the Divine will by inspired persons is, as such, miraculous; and therefore, before the adversaries of the Gospel can employ with propriety their objections to the particular miracles on which its credibility is rested, they should show the impossibility of any revelation whatsoever. If they grant, what indeed they cannot disprove, the possible existence of a revelation, it is absurd to say, that the Deity can interfere in the act of revealing his will, and cannot in supplying evidences for the reality of his interference. In whatsoever age the revelation be given, succeeding ages can know it only from testimony; and if they admit, on the report of their fellow-creatures, that God had inspired any being with the preternatural knowledge of his will, why should they deny, that he had enabled the same being to heal the sick, or to cleanse the

sufficient to say, that by a miracle I mean "an event out of the ordinary and settled course of nature, and such as could not have been produced either by the operation of its general laws, or by the combination of contingent circumstances:" Or, "an operation performed by any particular agent,

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leprous? And how, may it be asked, should the Divine teacher give a more direct and consistent proof of his preternatural commission, than by displaying those signs and wonders, which mark the finger of God?

As, then, the fact itself implies no impossibility, the credibility of it will depend upon the character of those who report it, and on the end which it professes to pursue.

That the Apostles could not be deceived, and that they had no temptation to deceive, has been repeatedly demonstrated; and so powerful is the proof adduced in support of their testimony, that the infidels of these later days have been obliged to abandon the ground on which their predecessors stood; to disclaim all moral evidences arising from the character and relation of eye-witnesses; and to maintain, upon metaphysical rather than historical principles, that miracles are utterly incapable in their own nature of existing in any circumstances, or of being supported by any evidence.

To illustrate these general observations on the subject of miracles by an induction of particular instances, would be unnecessary. Those instances have been frequently adduced and ably enforced by several eminent writers, and never more successfully than by one, whose long and well-spent life has been useful to the world, and ornamental to the learned body to which he belongs; whose erudition derives fresh lustre from his virtues, and whose character is equally venerable as a defender of the Christian faith, and as a pattern of Christian meekness and benevolence.

which transcends his skill and power, and which required the assistance of a supernatural being."

A celebrated champion of infidelity* has insidiously or erroneously maintained a miracle to be contrary to experience; whereas it is in reality only different from it. Experience informs us, that *one* event has happened often; testimony informs us that *another* event has happened once, or more. That diseases should be *generally* cured by the application of external causes, and *sometimes* at the mere word of a prophet, and without the visible application of causes, are facts not inconsistent with each other in the nature of things themselves, or irreconcilable according to our ideas. Each fact may arise from its own proper cause; each may exist independently of the other; and each is known by its own proper proof, be it of sense or testimony. As secret causes often produce events contrary to those we *do* expect from experience, it is equally conceivable that events should sometimes be produced which we do *not* expect.

To pronounce, therefore, a miracle to be false because it is different from experience, is only to conclude against its general existence from the very circumstance which constitutes its particular nature: for if it were not different from experience, where would be its singularity? Or what particular proof could be drawn from it, if it happened according to the ordinary train of human events, or was included in the operation of the general laws of nature? We

* Mr. Hume.

grant that it does differ from experience; but we do not presume to make our experience the standard of the Divine conduct. He that acknowledges a God, must at least admit the possibility of a miracle. The atheist, that makes him inseparable from what is called Nature, and binds him to its laws by an insurmountable necessity, — that deprives him of will, and wisdom, and power, as a distinct and independent Being, — may deny even the very possibility of a miraculous interposition, which can in any instance suspend or counteract those general laws by which the world is governed. But he who allows of a First Cause in itself perfect and intelligent, abstractedly from those effects which his wisdom and power have produced, must at the same time allow, that this cause can be under no such restraints as to be debarred the liberty of controlling its laws as often as it sees fit. Surely the Being that made the world can govern it, or any part of it, in such a manner as he pleases; and he that constituted the very laws by which it is in general conducted, may suspend the operation of those laws in any given instance; or impress new powers on matter, in order to produce new and extraordinary effects.

Here indeed it is proper for me to observe, that the force exerted in every miracle is finite, and may, in many cases, be in itself far less than what we see employed in the ordinary course of the world. The sudden suspension of the force which preserves any one planet in its orbit, is less than the constant exercise of that force which preserves all

the planets in their respective orbits; and yet it may be properly miraculous. It is not, therefore, necessary to say, that miracles cannot be performed by a power less than infinite. That no beings can change, or counteract, or supersede the order of things, as established by the Deity, without his appointment, is indeed the clear and necessary consequence of his omnipotence: but that he may appoint them to change it, involves no contradiction; that purposes of the highest moment may be answered by such appointment, implies no absurdity; and, therefore, in the case of miracles, whether the Deity performs them immediately by himself, or mediately by other agents, the great ends of religion are equally secured, and the proofs of his interposition may be equally luminous.

Miracles may be classed under two heads: those which consist in a *train* or *combination of events*, which could not have resulted from the ordinary arrangements of Providence; and those *particular operations* which are performed by instruments and agents incompetent to effect them without a preternatural power.

In the conduct of Providence respecting the Jewish people, from the earliest periods of their existence, as a distinct class of society, to the present time, we behold a singularity of circumstance and procedure, which we cannot account for on common principles. Comparing their condition and situation with that of other nations, we can meet with nothing similar to it in the history of mankind. So remark-

able a difference, conspicuous in every revolution of their history, could not have subsisted through mere accident. There must have been a cause adequate to so extraordinary an effect. Now, what should this cause be, but an interposition of Providence in a manner different from the course of its general government?—for the phenomenon cannot be explained by an application of those general causes and effects that operate in other cases.

The original propagation of Christianity was likewise an event which clearly discovered a miraculous interposition. The circumstances which attended it were such, as cannot rationally be accounted for on any other postulatum. I have already considered this subject at large. I would now observe, that the institutions of the law and the Gospel may not only appeal for their confirmation to a *train of events*, which, taken in a general and combined view, point out an extraordinary designation, and vindicate their claim to a divine authority; but also to a number of *particular operations*, which, considered distinctly, or in a separate and detached light, evidently display a supernatural power, immediately exerted on the occasion.

Since Christ himself constantly appealed to these works as the evidences of his divine mission and character, we will briefly examine how far they justified and confirmed his pretensions.

That our Lord laid the greatest stress on the evidence they afforded; nay, that he considered that evidence as sufficient to authenticate his claims

to the office of the Messiah with all reasonable and well-disposed enquirers, is manifest, not only from the words of my text, but also from a great variety of other passages in the Evangelists.

Thus, when the disciples of John were sent to Christ, to receive from his own lips the most satisfactory proofs of his divine mission, he referred them to his miracles. "Go," said he, "and show to John again those things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up."* Again, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works."†

This appeal to miracles was founded on the following just and obvious grounds.

First, that they are visible proofs of Divine approbation, as well as of Divine power; for it would have been inconclusive to have rested an appeal on the testimony of the latter, if it had not at the same time included an evidence of the former: and it was, indeed, a natural inference, that working of miracles in defence of a particular cause, was the seal of heaven to the truth of that cause. To suppose the contrary, would be to suppose, that God not only permitted his creatures to be deceived; but that he deviated from the ordinary course of his providence, purposely with a view to deceive them. The conclusion which the man, whom our Saviour restored to sight, drew from this miracle,

* Matt. xi. 4. † John, x. 25.

was exceedingly just, and founded on the common sentiments and impressions of the human heart. "We know," says he, "that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing."* If the cause which our Lord was engaged in had not been approved of by God, it would not have been honoured with the seal of miracles: for the Divine power can never be supposed to counteract the Divine will. This would be to set his nature at variance with itself; and, by destroying his simplicity, would destroy his happiness, and terminate in confusion and misery.

Hence we may justly reject as incredible those miracles which have been ascribed to the interposition of wicked spirits. The possibility of their interference is a mere hypothesis, depending upon gratuitous assumption, and leading to very dangerous consequences: and the particular instances, in which credulous superstition or perverted philosophy has supposed them to interfere, are, as facts, destitute of any clear and solid evidence, or as effects, often resolvible into natural causes.

Secondly, when our Lord appealed to his miracles as proofs of his Divine mission, it presupposed that those miracles were of such a nature as would bear the strictest examination; that they had all those

* John, ix. 31, 32.

criteria, which could possibly distinguish them from the delusions of enthusiasm, and the artifices of imposture; else the appeal would have been fallacious and equivocal.

He appealed to them with all the confidence of an upright mind, totally possessed with a consciousness of their truth and reality. This appeal was not drawn out into any laboured argument, nor adorned by any of the embellishments of language. It was short, simple, and decisive. He neither reasoned nor declaimed on their nature or their design. He barely pointed to them as plain and indubitable facts, such as spoke their own meaning, and carried with them their own authority.

The miracles which our Lord performed were too public to be suspected of imposture; and, being objects of sense, they were secured against the charge of enthusiasm. An impostor would not have acted so absurdly, as to have risked his credit on the performance of what he must have known it was not in his power to effect. And though an enthusiast, from the warmth of imagination, might have flattered himself with a full persuasion of his being able to perform some miraculous work; yet, when the trial was referred to an object of sense, the event must soon have exposed the delusion. The impostor would not have dared to say to the blind, *Receive thy sight;* to the deaf, *Hear;* to the dumb, *Speak;* to the dead, *Arise;* to the raging of the sea, *Be still;* lest he should injure the credit of his cause, by undertaking more than he could

perform. And though the enthusiast, under the delusion of his passions, might have confidently commanded disease to fly, and the powers of nature to be subject to his control; yet their obedience would not have followed his command.

The miracles of Christ, then, were such as an impostor would not have attempted; and such as an enthusiast could not have effected. They had no disguise; and were, in a variety of instances, of such a nature as to preclude the very possibility of collusion. They were performed in the midst of his bitterest enemies; and were so palpable and certain, as to extort the following acknowledgment, even from persons who were most eager to oppose his doctrines, and to discredit his pretensions: — "This man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him."*

The miracles Christ performed were, indeed, sufficient to alarm the fears of those whose downfall was involved in his success. And it was impossible for them to deny the facts, which so many thousands were ready to attest, on evidence too certain to admit even the possibility of mistake, delusion, or imposture. But his enemies, who admitted their reality and yet resisted their design, by not acknowledging the person who wrought them to be the Messiah, had recourse to the most impious and most absurd suppositions, in order to evade their evidence. The heathen imputed them to some occult power of magic; and thus applied what has no

* John, xi. 47, 48.

existence in nature, in order to account for a phenomenon that existed out of its common course. The stories of the Jews, who confessed the miracles, but denied what they were intended to establish, are too ridiculous to be mentioned. I must not, however, omit to take notice of the wicked and blasphemous cavil of the Pharisees, and the noble reply which our Lord made to it. They could not deny the fact, but they imputed it to the agency of an infernal spirit. "This fellow, said they, doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?"*

The purity of the doctrine which was taught by our blessed Lord was totally adverse to the kingdom of darkness. It tended to overthrow it, by the introduction of principles far different from those which Satan would inspire, and by prosecuting objects totally opposite to those which that wicked and malignant spirit would tempt us to pursue; so that in proportion to the prevalence of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of Satan would of course be diminished. Now, supposing miracles to be in the power of an infernal spirit, can it be imagined that he would communicate an ability of performing them to persons who were counteracting his designs? Would

* Matt. xii. 24.

he by them give credit to a cause, that tended to bring his own into disgrace?

Thus, as our Saviour appealed to miracles as proofs of his power; so he appealed to the inherent worth and purity of the doctrines they were intended to bear witness to, as a proof that the power was of God. In this manner do the external and internal evidences give and receive mutual confirmation and mutual lustre.

The truth of the Christian religion does not, however, wholly depend on the miracles wrought by its Divine Founder, though sufficient in themselves to establish his claims: but, in order to give the evidence of miracles the strongest force they could possibly acquire, that evidence was extended still farther; and the same power that our Lord possessed was communicated to his disciples, and their more immediate successors. Whilst yet on earth, he imparted to them this extraordinary gift, as the seal of their commission, when he sent them to preach the Gospel: and after his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, they were endowed with powers yet more stupendous. Sensible of the validity of this kind of evidence, the apostles of our Lord, with the same artless simplicity, and the same boldness of conscious integrity, which distinguished their great Master, constantly insisted upon the miracles they wrought, as strong and undeniable proofs of the truth of their doctrines. Thus the miracles of our blessed Lord may be justly considered as the evidence of his Divine mission and character.

If we consider their nature, their greatness, and their number; and if to this consideration we add that which respects their end and design, we must acknowledge, that no one could have performed them, unless God was with him. They were too public to be the artifices of imposture; too substantial and too numerous, to afford the slightest suspicion of undesigned and fortuitous coincidence. In a word, supposing that the Divine Being should in any instance so far counteract the common laws of nature as to produce a miracle, and should design that miracle as a monument to future times of the truth of any particular doctrine, we cannot conceive any mode of communicating it more effectual than that which he has chosen. Stronger proofs could not be afforded, consistently with the design of the Gospel, which is not to overpower our understandings by an irresistible and compulsory light, but to afford us such rational evidence as is sufficient to satisfy moral enquirers, who are endowed with faculties to perceive the truth; but, at the same time, who also have power totally to resist it, and finally to forfeit all its blessings.

It would lead me too far to pursue the subject of miracles in detail. What I have to urge may be, however, comprised under the following heads.

These miracles were of a nature too palpable to be mistaken. They were the objects of sense; and not the precarious speculations of reason concerning what God might do; or the chimerical suggestions of fancy concerning what he did. The facts were

recorded by those who must know whether they were true or false. The persons who recorded them were under no possible temptations to deceive the world. We can only account for their conduct on the supposition of their most perfect conviction, and disinterested zeal. That they should assert what they knew to be false; that they should publish it with so much ardour; that they should risk every thing dear to humanity, in order to maintain it; and at last submit to death, in order to attest their persuasion of its truth, in those moments when imposture usually drops its mask, and enthusiasm loses its confidence; that they should act thus in opposition to every dictate of common sense, and every principle of common honesty, every restraint of shame, and every impulse of selfishness; is a phenomenon not less irreconcilable to the moral state of things than miracles are to the natural constitution of the world. Falsehood naturally entangles men in contradiction, and confounds them with dismay; but the love of truth invigorates the mind; the consciousness of integrity anticipates the approbation of God; and conscience creates a fortitude, to which mere unsupported nature is often a stranger.*

The Divine mission of our blessed Lord was not only supported by a variety of miracles, which carried with them every mark of a supernatural power, and were immediate and visible evidences of the concurrence of the great Ruler of nature in that cause which they were brought to defend; but

* For some further observations on miracles, see the Notes.

it was illustrated and confirmed by a train of PROPHECIES, which, beginning with the fall, opened with greater lustre, and with a wider prospect, as the fulness of time drew near in which they were to receive their accomplishment.

To PROPHECIES, then, as well as MIRACLES, both Christ and his Apostles frequently appealed, as proofs of his mission. But he did not, like Mahomet, build his pretensions on some predictions that had no existence; or on others of which the conveyance was traditionary, and the meaning was equivocal. On the contrary, he appealed to those that were actually contained in public and solemn records, and which had been preserved for ages, with the care and reverence which was due to their high authority and momentous import. These records were preserved in the hands of his enemies, who admitted their divinity, and were well informed of their contents: so that he could not be accused of supporting his claims by doubtful and disgraceful evidence; by writings which long neglect had obscured, or insidious artifice had mutilated; by inferences from preceding records, which could not be contradicted, or by assumptions, which lay out of the reach of serious and direct confutation. Nor less in nature and quality, than in origin and credit, were the prophecies which our Lord appealed to; unlike those which Mahomet pretended to adduce in his favour; or those which his infatuated followers in later ages affected to discover in the Scriptures, and which they have wrested with

more absurdity than plausibility in support of their prophet.

The prophecies which respect the Messiah are neither few in number, nor vague and equivocal in their reference; but numerous, pointed, and particular. They bear on them those discriminating marks by which Divine inspiration may be distinguished from the conjectures of human sagacity; and a necessary or probable event, from a casual and uncertain contingency. They are such as cannot be referred to the dictates of mere natural penetration, because they are not confined to general occurrences; but point out with singular exactness a variety of minute circumstances relating to times, places, and persons, which were neither objects of foresight nor conjecture, because they were not necessarily connected with the principal event, or even probable either in themselves or in their relation. They were such as could only have occurred to a mind that was under the immediate influence of the divinity, by which distant periods were revealed, and the secrets of unborn ages disclosed.

The scheme of prophecy, considered in its first opening, its gradual advance, and its final and full completion in the advent, the ministry, the death, and resurrection of the Messiah, and the extensive progress of his Gospel among the Gentiles, together with its blessed influence on individuals, societies, countries, and the whole race of mankind, is an object the greatest and most sublime that imagin-

ation can conceive, and the most pleasing and important that the human mind can contemplate.

We behold the promise of a Redeemer given to our first parents immediately after the fall, in obscure and general terms. It foretold a victory that would be gained over the enemy that had deceived and conquered them; a victory the most illustrious in its effects and consequences; and which should amply revenge on the *serpent's head* the evils and miseries which he had introduced into the world.

We behold the promise renewed in somewhat clearer language to the patriarchs; particularly to Abraham, the great father of the faithful.

Here the great purposes of Providence begin to disclose themselves with a fuller and brighter lustre at every step. With this venerable patriarch the Almighty condescended to enter into a peculiar covenant; and, to excite his obedience, he promised to raise up from him a great nation; to take him and his family under his immediate patronage; and to make all the nations of the earth blessed through him.*

The latter part of this promise is peculiarly memorable, as containing in it the proper end for which God had chosen and separated him and his posterity. It is very fitly made by the sacred writers the foundation of God's dispensations to him; and may be regarded as a mark to direct the

* Gen. xxii. 17, 18. xxvi. 4.

reader to the great object to which they ultimately referred.

The scene opens with one man; and extends itself wider and wider, till we see the light of Divine truth diffusing its influence over the earth by Jesus Christ, who according to the flesh sprang from his loins; and fulfilled the promise made unto the father, that "in Isaac should his seed be called."

We first see the promise of God to this ancient patriarch fulfilled by giving him a son, contrary to all human expectations. The next grand step of its accomplishment was in the twelve patriarchs. We see them, through the amazing, and, to human view, incomprehensible direction of Divine Providence, settled in Egypt; and, through the influence of Joseph, who miraculously became a person of distinguished credit and consequence in the court of Pharaoh, treated with peculiar respect; and indulged with allotments, which made their situation not merely commodious, but even splendid.

At length the scene changes, but the great drama is still carried on. Its intricacies are unravelling, and its design unfolds itself more and more. For what can baffle Eternal Wisdom? or what can counteract the might of Omnipotence? The posterity of Israel are subjected to the tyranny of a king "that knew not Joseph." They are oppressed and harassed, and reduced to the most abject state of penury and servitude. Their cries, however, enter into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; and a deliverer is sent.

He first attempts to deliver them by the voluntary consent of Pharaoh. He endeavours to convince their oppressor, by the most awful and stupendous miracles, that God was with his people of a truth; that he would avenge their wrongs; and that he who opposed them fought against Heaven. But the haughty spirit of Pharaoh disdained submission; though conscience sometimes was appalled, and made him anticipate what he had neither the courage to defy, nor the virtue to prevent. When arguments which he was unable to confute, aided by miracles he was unable to deny, could not shake him from his purpose; when every concession was retracted, as soon as it was made; when stubbornness and irresolution actuated him alternately, and craft was called in to the aid of violence; Moses, by the command of the Most High, endeavoured to rescue this oppressed people by force.

In spite of opposition, and contrary to all human prospect of success in the arduous and hazardous enterprise, he left Egypt; resolved to resist if pursued, and to die rather than to return to the house of bondage. Under the greatest disadvantages, and amidst appearances the most unpromising, this great man, supported by the arm of Omnipotence, conducted his followers out of the land of Egypt: and, that God might show his power, and give them the most undeniable proof of his Divine patronage, he led them designedly out of the direct and common path, and brought them to the Red Sea. There

the Lord made bare his arm, opened a passage in the deep, and guided them through, as on dry land. Miracles were displayed to animate their hopes, as well as to dispel their fears. Their escape had the air of a triumph: where they had passed through safely the Egyptian hosts were overwhelmed with destruction.

The difficulties which this people struggled with in a barren and dangerous wilderness were peculiarly great: difficulties which were heightened still by their own ingratitude, discontent, and unbelief. They laboured under all the calamities of pestilence, of famine, and of war; they had all the rage of the elements, and all the desolations of the earth, to contend with. Yet still amidst these intricate and perilous paths, through which they were called to wander, the unerring purpose of God was neither frustrated nor impeded. The plot, viewed only in broken and detached scenes, was embarrassed and involved; but there was an Almighty Presider over every successive event, who, by a gradual evolution of his designs, conferred order and consistency on the whole.

When they were parched with thirst, then did Omnipotence cause even the flinty rock to flow for their refreshment; when hungry and faint with the toils of the day, then did Heaven supply them with its own manna, and sent quails into their camp to satisfy their extreme necessities. By the same power the walls of a fortified city fell to the ground:

" and the sun and moon stood still in their habitation*," at the voice of the leader of Israel.

Armies renowned for battle, and commanded by skilful and powerful leaders, " were driven asunder" (to use the expressive language of Scripture) " like the foam upon the waters, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn."† Surely we may say, God was with this people. He led on their victorious bands; conducted them over Jordan, and at last settled them in the land promised to their forefathers. Here he established his throne, and erected his temple. Here he delivered the great statutes of his kingdom, the laws of righteousness, and the ordinances of distinction. Here too, by the mouth of all his holy prophets, he gradually disclosed the several particulars of the grand and mysterious scheme of man's redemption; and here he at length accomplished them, in that great event which included the result of all.

The important purpose, for which the Jews *in general* had been thus miraculously separated from the rest of mankind, was evidently to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, by preserving and transmitting the worship, the promises, and the predictions of the Almighty to future generations. The *particular* separation of one tribe from the great body of the Jewish nation was plainly an act of the same Divine power, and became, in a manner equally striking, subservient to the accomplishment of the same great design.

* Hab. iii. 11. † Hos. x. 7. Job, xxiv. 24.

As he who was to bless all the families of the earth was to spring from the seed of Abraham, so it was foretold that he should arise out of the tribe of Judah, which was a particular branch of that general stock. For the sake of preserving a recorded lineage in uninterrupted succession, this tribe was kept distinct amidst every revolution of the Jewish nation: and amidst the depressions and changes of its various states, as it had been foretold by Jacob, Judah maintained within itself a peculiar prerogative and dignity, till the great end which was to be effected by its separation from the other tribes of Israel, as well as from the world in general, was accomplished. The prophecy limited the period when this end would be fully answered; even when Shiloh, or the Messiah, should come: and then its authority should cease, and the very ensigns and badges of its former dignity and pre-eminence should be no more: the sceptre should depart from Judah; and its lawgiver should lose all authority to enact laws, and all power to enforce them.*

The scene of prophecy opened with a clearer and more majestic view to David and the prophets. David foretold the change of the order of the priesthood by the Messiah; the office he should himself sustain; the sufferings he should undergo; and the glorious triumphs he should enjoy from his resurrection, his ascension, and the extensive propagation of his Gospel.†

In process of time it disclosed secrets still more

* Gen. xlix. 10. † Psalm ii. 6, &c.; cx. 1, &c.

inscrutable to human penetration; and unfolded, to the astonished eye, events and circumstances that were beyond the power of imagination to conceive, or of expectation to anticipate,—events of which present appearances gave no intimation; and circumstances so totally independent of the general occurrences of the world, that supposing the latter to have been foreseen, yet the former would not have been conjectured.

The prophets have not only foretold in general terms a great revolution that would take place in the world by the coming of the Messiah, but they have delineated some particular circumstances attending it, which only the eye of Omniscience could have foreseen. They have marked out the precise time* and place† of our Saviour's birth; they have described with wonderful exactness the distinguishing features of his office and character; they have displayed with equal beauty and truth the effects and consequences of his advent: and through all their predictions something pointing to the Messiah, either by direct application, or by secondary and distant reference, is so interwoven with the general contexture, the universal scheme of prophecy, that, by keeping it in our eye, we shall be furnished with a clew to trace out their ultimate design, and contemplate their mutual connexion with, and dependence on, each other. *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.* This is its ruling and its vital principle. Divested of this, it loses its spirit and its power:

* Dan. ix. 24, &c. † Mic. v. 2.

we behold no consistency: the impression of its dignity is weakened; its object is debased; its end is darkened. But, viewed in this light, we behold in it a harmony which delights; a grandeur which astonishes: and from the result of the whole arises such evidence as carries conviction to the understanding.

The prophet Isaiah has particularly foretold, that the Messiah should be born of a virgin*, and that he should descend from the family of David†, which was a particular branch of the tribe of Judah. While he points out his miraculous birth, and describes his descent, he portrays his character in colours so striking and distinguishing, as to render its appropriation to Christ obvious to every one who compares the picture with the original. It was this holy prophet that foretold that the Messiah should be destitute of outward power or influence to attract the esteem, and ensure the attachment, of the world‡; that though in the eye of God he should be "the chief corner-stone§," elect, precious, yet that he should be "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence‖" to men who were guided by the springs which in general actuate the human breast, such as interest, ambition, and the love of sensual enjoyments: and particularly it was foretold, that the Jews should "fall on this rock¶;" should refuse to build on him as the only foundation of their hopes; but should, in their attempt to shake and overthrow

* Isai. vii. 14. † Id. ix. 6, 7.; xi. 1, 2. ‡ Id. liii. 1—3.
§ Id. xxviii. 16. ‖ Id. viii. 14, 15. ¶ Ibid.

it, be themselves scattered and broken to pieces. The same prophet declared, that he should veil the eyes of the wise and learned, and preach the Gospel to the poor and illiterate*; that he should restore sight to the blind, health to the diseased, and light to those who had been oppressed with darkness†; that he should teach the true and perfect way, and should be the great instructor of the Gentiles; that kings should fall down before him, and all nations pay him homage and obedience‡; that his reign should be gentle and benevolent; and that the influence of his Gospel should harmonise the jarring passions of mankind §, and, together with the knowledge and worship of the true God, establish peace and purity on the earth.‖

In the fifty-third chapter, the prophet gives a most striking and affecting picture of the temper and behaviour of the Messiah amidst the most distressing and humiliating scenes through which he passed. His death, considered as the great propitiation for the sins of the whole world, was an object of such vast importance, that it pleased the Divine Being strongly to mark the more distinguishing circumstances of it in prophetic language; to the end that our faith in him might have every evidence to confirm it that was necessary to give satisfaction to modest and impartial enquirers. The fact in every respect corresponded with the prediction; and so far was the prophet introduced into the secret counsels

* Isaiah, vi. 9—11. † Id. xlii. 1, &c. ‡ Id. lx. 10.
§ Id. lv. 13. ‖ Id. lvi. 6—8.

of the Divine mind, that when he spoke of future events, he appears to be relating their past history: for to that omniscient God, whose light directed the prophet's eye through the darkest recesses of distant ages, prescience and accomplishment are the same; and the future and the past form but one object. Hence the most striking scenes of our Lord's passion are delineated by the prophetic pencil with the same truth and exactness as if they had been drawn on the spot when the secret volume of the Divine decrees was unrolled, and when that which had been foreseen in vision was exhibited in reality.*

The ancient prophecies concerning the rude insults and the ungracious taunts of the people †; their casting lots for his vesture, and parting his garments amongst them; the soldiers' attack on his dead body ‡; and his being lodged after death in the sepulchre of the rich §; literally describe those circumstances which did in fact attend the passion of our blessed Lord.

Prophecy became more clear and illustrious, as "the day-spring from on high" advanced. Its last period succeeded the return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon: and the three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, give a striking account of the character and office of the Messiah, and of the glorious effects of his advent.

I have not time to enlarge on the particular nature and distinct objects of those later prophecies,

* Compare Mark, xv. 27, 28

† Psalm xxii. 7. 18.

‡ Zech. xii. 10.

§ Isaiah, liii. 9.

nor to point out their immediate correspondence with the facts to which they related, and by which they were illustrated and fulfilled. It will be sufficient to speak of them with a general reference; and their application to our blessed Lord will be obvious to every one that has the slightest knowledge of the great end of his mission, and of the means which he made use of to accomplish that end.*

Thus the completion of distant and unconnected prophecies in the life and character, the sufferings and the triumphs, of our blessed Saviour, point him out as the "Messiah which was to come;" and, in concurrence with the miracles he wrought, form a system of external evidence, illustrious, harmonious, and convincing.

The time will not permit me to enlarge on the striking prophecies of our blessed Lord: but they were such as gave additional evidence to his Divine character, and clearly proved him to be filled with a spirit more than human. He uttered numerous predictions of events altogether improbable on the ground of present appearances, and such as the most penetrating mind could neither have foreseen nor conjectured, much less have described with all their peculiarities, and marked out the several incidents that attended them.

Our blessed Lord foretold his own death, with all its distinguishing circumstances. He foretold the treachery of one disciple, and the cowardice of an-

* See Hag. ii. 4, &c. Zech. vi. 11, &c. Mal. iii. 1—3; iv. 1, 2.

other. He predicted the persecutions to which his followers would be exposed; the opposition which should be made against the Gospel, and its extraordinary and glorious triumph over the power and policy of the world. He foretold the astonishing (and to all human views improbable) fate of the temple of Jerusalem, and the signal destruction of the city. He even foretold the period when this awful event should take place, and described the very ensigns of those arms that were to effect the direful catastrophe. He foretold the various calamities that should befall the Jewish nation, and the total ruin in which their church and state should be involved. All that was predicted was fully, clearly, and literally accomplished. The temple was levelled to the ground; nor could imperial munificence, when exercised with a malignant view to confront the prophecy of our Lord, renew the structure, or even remove the ruins of it, for the erection of another edifice. The Jews were overtaken by the severest inflictions of Heaven, and the blood of him whom they had crucified was revenged on their children and their country; while to this day they remain the signal monuments of the truth of prophecy; and, having totally lost the "sceptre," and having no "lawgiver" independently of a foreign tribunal, they afford a visible and standing proof, that "the Shiloh is come, to whom the gathering of the people should be."

From a revelation thus authenticated by a long and stupendous train of miracles, which bear the very

stamp and seal of Omnipotence; and by a striking and connected series of prophecies, literally and exactly accomplished in the person of its Author; prophecies of events which the Eternal Wisdom could alone have foreseen, and the Eternal Power alone have brought to pass—from a revelation, I say, authenticated by such overpowering evidence what rational enquirer can withhold his assent? Or where, we may boldly ask, amidst the numerous varieties of religious opinion, which in all ages of the world have influenced the belief and directed the practice of mankind, where shall we find a system that can boast of attestations in any degree equal or similar to those of the Gospel? Let the adversaries of our holy faith point out a religion that bears such visible impressions of an Almighty hand; let them do this, and we are content to renounce our cause, to forego for ever, what we now cannot but assert, the exclusive title of Christianity to the venerable character of truth.

Surely in vain will they seek for such a parallel in all the fictions of Mahometism.

We have already examined the lofty pretensions of the prophet of Arabia: but, instead of evidence, we have found extravagant and confident assertions; instead of argument, we have heard bold and confused declamation. When called upon by his unbelieving countrymen to produce proofs of his mission, and to work some miracle in attestation of his title to the prophetic office, in the evasive language of imposture he shrunk from the just and pertinent

requisition, and, with a tone of affected dignity, referred them to the supernatural elegance and sublimity of the Koran.

The Redeemer of mankind, in answer to the pious scruples of his friends, or the captious questions of his enemies, with the same majestic simplicity of an upright and elevated mind, appealed to "the works which he wrought in his Father's name;" to the sick whom he had healed, the blind who had received their sight, the lepers whom he had cleansed, and the dead whom he had raised to life.

If for a moment we admit, even in its utmost extent, that wildest claim of the impostor to the boasted miracle of the Koran, yet weak and equivocal is the evidence it affords, when compared with those mighty works which dignify and confirm the ministry of Jesus Christ. The reality of this pretended miracle, and the proof which arises from it, can only be determined at the fallible tribunal of taste and criticism: but the works of Jesus, instead of resting on the precarious ground of imagination, derive their credit from the testimony of the senses, of all depositions the most faithful and unquestionable.

Nor is the inferiority of the religion of Mahomet to that of Christ less striking and obvious with respect to the attestation of prophecy than it is with regard to miracles. But to enter into a regular and formal contrast of the two religions, would in either case be unnecessary, and even impossible. For, amidst all the unsubstantial visions of Mahometism,

amidst all the arrogant pretences of its founder, we are unable to discover any proofs which can, with the least shadow of reason, be opposed to the solid and convincing evidence of the Gospel.

Allowing, however, *ex hypothesi* (what never can be granted in reality), the justice of that extravagant claim of the audacious impostor to certain predictions which once existed in our Scriptures; admitting yet further the propriety of the interpretation, by which his infatuated followers still labour to wrest a variety of passages in support of his pretensions; yet, even on these suppositions, who can, without presumption, compare these vague and equivocal testimonies to the pointed and decisive evidence which arises from the vast, the splendid scheme of Christian prophecy?—a scheme which, by its magnificence, overpowers the imagination, and of whose grandeur the most exalted description can convey but faint and inadequate ideas.

We behold, with astonishment, a spirit of prophecy pervading all time; commencing so early as the fall of man, and extending to the final consummation of all things: we see it uniformly characterising one person; first by dark and obscure intimations, then gradually unfolding itself with brighter and brighter lustre at every step, till the appearance of HIM who was its ultimate end and object. In Him and his apostles, but particularly in his beloved disciple, we behold it once more renewed, and predicting with peculiar exactness

every important event which should befall his church, even from its earliest establishment down to that period of awful expectation, when the great plan of Divine grace shall be brought to a glorious and consistent conclusion, and the mysterious counsels of the Almighty, respecting the Christian dispensation, shall be for ever closed in judgment.

ROBERT GRAY, D. D.

BISHOP OF BRISTOL.

From his Lordship's "*Discourses on Various Subjects, illustrative of the Evidence, Influence, and Doctrines of Christianity.*" 1793. 8vo. Rivingtons.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

MATT. x. 34.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

OUR blessed Saviour, when he appointed his disciples to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, broke out into some prophetic descriptions of the immediate effects which the introduction of that kingdom would produce. To the apostles, he held out the prospect of journeys without customary provision, of rejection from the unworthy, of danger from brutish adversaries, of persecution and flight, and destruction to the body. "And the brother," says our Lord, in farther anticipation of impending scenes, "shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death:" "for I am come," continues he, "to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."*

* The Bishop of London [PORTEUS], in a discourse on the words of the text, maintains that they relate solely to the first

Such, did Christ foresee, would sometimes be the partial and perverted consequences of the preaching of that gospel which was ushered in by angels as a dispensation of good-will towards mankind; such the shades and darkness which should lour over that law which revealed the precepts of benevolence and Christian charity to mankind. It may be interesting and instructive, in pointing out the accomplishment of these predictions in some important instances, to consider from what causes it has happened that a blessing so real and substantial as that of Christianity should, in some respects, have been made a pretext for dissension, and a subject of sorrow; and farther, it may contribute to vindicate our religion from unjust aspersions, if we demonstrate that those evils, which have been represented to flow from Christianity, have derived their existence from sources very remotely different, however unjustly traced to that origin, however appearing to roll in one common tide with its effects.

It has been supposed by some commentators, that Christ, in the predictions above cited, alluded to the discord and wars, as well civil as external, which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem, of which their historian gives very striking and af-

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preachers of the Gospel. The learned bishop does not, however, it is apprehended, mean to restrict the subsequent passages in the chapter merely to the apostles. They appear at least to bear a more extended reference to some general consequences which our Lord foreknew would result from the passions of men on the propagation of Christianity.

fecting accounts*, and of which Christ himself evidently prophesied upon another occasion, in pathetic description of tribulation, famine, pestilence, and war†; and, doubtless, his discourse had some reference to these national distresses; since the conversion of the Jews, who embraced Christianity, must have tended to aggravate, by dissension, the calamities which affected that people; but it must also be allowed, that our Saviour seems principally to allude to those consequences which should be ascribed more immediately to the introduction of his religion.

That some partial evils did accompany the propagation of Christianity, those who are acquainted with its history will readily admit; though certainly the cavillers against religion have as much exaggerated their extent, as they have mistaken their cause, and reasoned falsely from their existence. The confessed adversaries of Revelation have accused it of effects which it did not countenance; and have triumphed, with false and profane exultation, when they have pointed out the perverted application of an imparted blessing; while the mistaken or insidious historian hath minutely dwelt on the misconduct, and deliberately aggravated the crimes of those who have professed themselves the disciples of Jesus. The earlier periods of Christianity have been industriously darkened, the shades

* Joseph. Bell. Jud. l. iv—vii. Euseb. Hist. Eccles. l. ii. c. 6.

† Matt. xxiv.

of ignorance and superstition have been heightened by unfair representation, and whole nations and ages have been condemned with unjust and indiscriminate censure. By such contrivance religion has been described, like the superstition of antiquity, as the oppressive enemy of mankind, trampling on human life, and instigating to evil; and those who accept its revelations as divine, have been unable to conceive why the merciful dispensation of God, "clothed as it is with the sun," and encircled with the radiance of an heavenly crown*, should sometimes appear to lour with so unfavourable an aspect to mankind. Rejecting, however, such misrepresentations, and considering religion in its true character, as distinct from those towering spectres of superstition which have assumed its name, we shall find that Christianity, above every dispensation in the natural or moral world, descends from its Author with a gentle and friendly influence.

Impartially, indeed, to state the history of Christianity, would not be to point out the mistakes and crimes of weak or artful men, who have misunderstood its nature, or borrowed its semblance, but to exhibit its effect on the general opinion and conduct of those converted to its instructions; and then would it be found that its seeds, where they have been sown, have produced good fruits, whatever tares may have been scattered with them; and that though it could not entirely change the manners, and extirpate the hurtful passions of mankind, it

* Rev. xii. 1.

hath improved the temper of every age on which it has spread its principles.

The evils which, agreeably to our Saviour's predictions, have been attributed to Christianity, are either those which attended its first propagation, or those which sprung up under its establishment. Christ himself, and his first followers, suffered from the introduction of that sword of which he predicted the effects, but forbad the use.* She, even, "who had found favour with God," and who was "blessed among women," was "pierced," as by "a sword, to the soul," as Simeon had foretold, by that "fruit of her womb," which the Holy Ghost had pronounced to be blessed. Jesus and his apostles were attacked with swords and with staves. A spear pierced the side of our Redeemer on the cross; and they who were sent forth, "harmless as doves," to communicate blessings, and to impart the tidings of salvation to mankind, were taught to expect every destruction but that of the soul.

Scattered, after the death of their Lord, and filled with the Holy Ghost, the disciples published, every where, with inspired zeal and power, the doctrines which they had received. As the proofs and excellency of the Gospel were displayed, they excited the admiration of mankind; yet, as its advocates opposed predominant interests, and attacked inveterate opinions, they sometimes addressed their arguments with little success to prejudiced and deluded men. Such as ignorantly or obstinately rejected

* Matt. xxvi. 52, 53. Luke, xxii. 38.

the doctrines proposed for their acceptance, entertained resentment against teachers who attacked their deep-rooted passions and immediate interests. Here, then, the animated zeal with which they who were baptized into the faith were inspired, to propagate revelations, on which depended the happiness and future salvation of mankind, served but to generate opposition and contest. As that zeal was, doubtless, also in proportion to the strength of affection which subsisted; and as exertions were more incautious where established intimacies lessened restraint, domestic dissensions necessarily arose, and as Christ had foreseen, "a man's foes were those of his own household."

The dissensions and afflictions which Christ and his disciples experienced, in their endeavours to plant the faith, may be represented as the first of those evils which resulted from the introduction of religion. Yet who, with justice, shall accuse Christianity of evils to which it gave no countenance; who, in contemplating the economy of a Divine dispensation, which is to be completed in a future life, shall murmur at the fate of those whose virtues were tried, and called forth in affliction, and who "rejoiced, and were exceedingly glad," in the expectation of that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which had been promised in recompense of their well-supported sufferings, conscious "that their light affliction was but for a moment; and looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are

seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

The pure and enlightened faith of the Gospel disdained to mingle its service with the pollutions of idolatry. The first and self-existing Cause, and Creator of the universe, jealous of his exclusive pre-eminence and rights, accepted not a divided adoration; nor could the worship of an holy and supreme Lord be reconciled, like that of any heathen deity, with "the bowing down" to other gods. The disciples of that Teacher, who had ratified the command, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," could not but sternly refuse to associate, in religious communion, with the votaries of heathen deities. Their unaffected and lively zeal could not but express its determined abhorrence of predominant idolatries, and seek to shun the contagion of those principles which vitiated the whole constitution of society; which mixed themselves with the general laws and institutions, with the civil arrangements and social habits of life; and which displayed their effects in common transactions, and in private intercourse, in every scene of public celebration or domestic enjoyment. Hence the peculiar severity with which the Roman magistrates persecuted a religion, which tended totally to subvert the established system of idolatry, thus intimately incorporated with every regulation of society; and hence the unjust and determined aversion with which they viewed Christianity, which daily offended the passions, the opinions, and the

presumed interests of mankind. Hence the first cruelties which they exercised on the disciples of a religion founded by a crucified Lord, and strengthened by the sufferings and martyrdom of his afflicted disciples.

Mildness and persuasion, gentle measures, and conciliating argument, were the methods which Christ commanded, and which his apostles adopted. If the passions of mankind were excited, and gradually mingled in the cause; if the introduction of light was opposed by those who loved darkness, are we, therefore, to complain of the effect of light? Christianity introduced not persecution into the world, though it became itself the object of persecution. Religious bigotry had uttered its harsh decrees from heathen tribunals *, and religious animo-

* That the spirit of persecution had introduced itself into the Roman councils, notwithstanding the genius of polytheism, is certain, even from Mr. Gibbon's account, though he by no means states fully the acts of their intolerant power. He represents the Emperor Tiberius, and Claudius, to have only suppressed the dangerous power of the Druids in Gaul; and asserts, that the priests themselves, their gods, and their altars, subsisted till the final destruction of paganism, though "the accurate Suetonius," as he elsewhere styles him, in the place to which Gibbon refers, says of the latter emperor, "Druidarum religionem apud Gallos penitus abolevit," utterly abolished the religion of the Druids among the Gauls. Sueton. in Claud. § 25. See other proofs of Roman persecution in the destruction of the temple of Isis and Serapis; in the delegation of 4000 freedmen to probable destruction in Sardinia; and in the expulsion from Italy of all who professed the Hebrew or Egyptian religion.

sities had excited contests among pagan nations. If the ministers of Christianity, when raised from depression and contempt, sometimes practised a severity which they had been taught*; if its protectors, in the confidence of earthly power, prescribed its acceptance in a tone too imperious; if, in disregard of the precepts of their Divine Master, they sometimes employed the secular arm where spiritual weapons alone should have been employed, are we to forget that religion is not responsible for a conduct which it condemned? Such mischief arose, not because Christianity was introduced, but because its true spirit was weakened or obscured.

The chief persecutions which have been carried on in the name of Christ have been those excited by a superstitious and corrupted church †; and by that antichristian power, which was prophetically characterised as "drunken with the blood of the saints." The pure and considerate precepts of our Lord abjure coercive and oppressive conduct; and where his church has been reformed to its true prin-

* See Bishop Porteus's Twelfth Sermon, p. 273. Even Voltaire, in speaking of some persecution which the Christians carried on from resentment in Syria and Palestine, says, that Ammianus Marcellinus, who describes the persecution, does not notice the great virtues which they had displayed. See also Bishop Watson's Apol. for Christianity, annexed to Sermons, p. 338.

† As those directed against the Waldenses and Albigenses; those against the Jews and Moors (which, in the latter instance, were stimulated by political considerations. See Watson's Philip II. vol. i. b. ix.); and those designed to promote the re-establishment of popery in this country. See Revel. xvii. 6.

ciples, all intolerant and compulsive measures have been condemned and abhorred.

In the growth and extension of that power which gradually rose into papal pre-eminence, and secular dominion, and which erected a superstition of unmeaning ceremonies and pernicious tenets on the ruins of the true faith, we behold not the operation of religion, but the crafty designs and successful ambition of unrighteous men, assuming the specious and attractive name of Christianity, while they closed the volume of its laws, veiling their unhallowed passions under the pretensions and mantle of apparent piety. Had Christianity been unknown, some pretended revelations might have been published by crafty and ambitious men, and the inventions of imposture have been disclosed to assist the exertion of passions that panted for gratification. Such, in the times of paganism, often were contrived: such, in other countries, and in later periods, were fabricated and imposed by an enterprising and aspiring conqueror, with design to facilitate the establishment of an earthly empire.

Let the hasty and superficial enquirer declaim against the religion of Christ, when he contemplates the folly and enthusiasm of those who enlisted in confederate attempts, and unfolded the banners of the cross, for the recovery of that land on which the Redeemer of mankind conversed and was crucified*; or when, in later times, he considers the

* Bishop Porteus's Twelfth Sermon, p. 286. Robertson, in another point of view, represents many beneficial effects to

civil dissensions, the unrestrained persecutions, or the intemperate enterprises * which have been carried on under the name of Christ, and under the pretence of establishing his faith. In these, the considerate mind will discover rather the lurking passions and secret lusts, that the corruption of a depraved nature generated; which, in barbarous and dark periods, broke out into excesses that no laws could control; and which, by the insidious instigation of the apostate spirit, clothed themselves in the garb and sanctions of that religion which was levelled against their dominion.

For the effects of these passions, the advocate of Christianity has no apology to offer; he contends only, that they are not the fruits of that law which God communicated, however chargeable on those who professed an obedience to that law. Religious wars have been excited by political interests †; re-

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have been produced to Europe by the Crusades, which opened an intercourse with countries where the knowledge of many useful arts and improvements, of civilisation and commerce, were preserved; an acquaintance which effected salutary and most important changes in the property and manners, and oppressive government of the feudal times. See Robertson's View of the State of Europe, prefixed to History of Charles V. vol. i. § i. p. 23.

* It would be unjust to attribute the conduct of the Spaniards in America to religious zeal. The Jesuits every where made religion a veil for political views.

† The persecutions carried on by Charles the Fifth, and by Philip the Second, were heightened and regulated by ambitious views; and, under the reign of the latter prince, by a super-

ligious dissensions have been provoked by civil animosities *, and religious persecutions have been raised by personal hatred. Here, then, religion was the pretence, not the cause; and the impartial enquirer should not credulously assent to every profession, and to every affected motive, but candidly investigate the latent springs and concealed designs of them.

The visionary fancies which philosophy first blended with religion †; the absurd principles and

stitious veneration for the Roman see. The inquisition, wherever it has been established, hath been the instrument as much of political as of religious tyranny.

* Religion had so little to do with the civil wars and factions carried on under the banners of religion in France, that we learn from their historians, that the Condes and Colignis embraced the reformed faith because the Guises were of the Romish church. The account of Davila is very remarkable: he says, that the admiral Andelot advised the patronising of the Calvinists, in order to spur them on to the destruction of the house of Lorrain, which (besides other advantages) would make it believed, for the future, by all the world, that the civil war was first kindled, and blown up, not on the princes' account, and their pretensions to the government, but by dissensions and controversies in matters of religion. He adds, that it was a counsel and resolution so fatal and pernicious, that, as it opened a door to all those miseries and calamities which, with terrible example, for a long time, afflicted and distracted that kingdom, so it brought to a miserable end both the person himself that advised it, and all those who, led by their affections and present interests, consented to it. See Farneworth's Translation of Davila, book i. p. 33.

† The schisms and heresies which disturbed the peace of the primitive church, and introduced endless controversies and

extravagant errors gradually accumulated; and the scholastic subtleties, speculations, and disputes which were incorporated with it, at the revival of literature, when fairly considered, reflect discredit only on those who interwove such vanities with inspired wisdom, and debase not the purity of truth.

The gradual departure from Christian righteousness in the practice of its professors, which kept place with the corruption of the faith, and which at last attained to that height of depravity that called loudly for reform, can be urged only to illustrate the sad effects of superstition, and impeach not the perfection and natural tendency of a law, which in every line inculcates holiness, in every precept exhorts to purity. They prove that alliance which subsists between opinion and practice; and demonstrate, that in proportion as the word of God is neglected and concealed, corrupt manners and licentious conduct will prevail.

In the fanatic zeal, and in the degrading superstitions that have, in modern times, disgraced the professors of our holy religion, we behold the un-

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dissensions, originated chiefly from the prejudices of Jewish sectaries, or from the errors of Gentile converts, who adopted Christianity without abjuring their former opinions, which they blended with the simple truths of the Gospel. The corruptions of the Jewish sects, and the follies of heathen philosophy, were interwoven and entangled with the doctrines of Revelation; and the Gaulanites, the Nazarenes, and the Gnostics, and all who were infected with the reasonings of the Gentile wisdom, disputed for their peculiar tenets as if they had been the doctrines of Christ. See Lardner's Hist. of Heret. b. i. § 13.

happy influence of human corruption, which, impatient of restraint, and base in its suggestions, has misapplied and perverted the precepts of an all-perfect law. The law itself doth not authorise excess, nor give sanction to folly; but men of weak and impatient minds have blended their extravagant notions with its precepts, and been hurried, by heated imaginations, to erroneous and disreputable conduct. Every virtue hath its excess; and nothing useful can be prescribed that is not capable of dangerous and extravagant application: but true piety is not less honourable, because inflamed passions have engendered frensied and ecstatic fancies; sincere faith is not less salutary, because credulity hath inclined to fictitious inventions and a superstitious creed.

If a zeal for God's service has been combined with an intolerant spirit; if a reverence for religion has been deemed compatible with inactive and secluded abstraction from its duties; if a fervent regard to the welfare of Christ's church hath been counterfeited by ambitious and dissembling passions, the mistakes, or the evil designs of unrighteous men, reflect no discredit on a temperate and obedient reverence for a revealed law. The hypocrisy which hath debased devotion; the barren faith which hath been divorced from obedience; the errors, corruptions, and mockeries, which have been blended with religious worship, should be severed, in the estimation of considerate men, from the genuine and undefiled character of Christian righteousness.

The ancient schisms, the numerous sects and heresies, which still prevail, which alienate the affections, and embitter the intercourse of mankind, from whence come they? "Come they not hence, even of your lusts?" The doctrines of Christ are simple, and proffered in simple language to our acceptance: if our judgment err in the conception of them, it is because that judgment is, by the depravity of the heart, misled. Dissensions and heresies were what our inspired teachers foresaw and predicted*; and their existence must be urged in establishment, not in detraction, of our religion. The sacred monitors, however, by foretelling such divisions, furnished not the disobedient with any plea or apology for their conduct. Conscious that such evils would happen, Christ, nevertheless, denounced wrath against their authors. "It is impossible," says our Divine Master, "but that offences must come; but woe unto that man through whom they come." They who maintain that God may be delighted with different principles and various modes of worship, do not therefore sufficiently reflect on the nature and claims of his attributes, nor on the intention and ultimate tendency of revealed truth. As prejudice shall be dispersed, and reason operate, the lustre and excellency of divine truth will be displayed; and it is not, surely, a too sanguine interpretation of prophetic promises, which points out the prospect of a final establish-

* Matt. xviii. 7. 1 Cor. xi. 19. 2 Peter ii. 1. Acts xx. 29, 30. Luke, ii. 34, 35. 1 Tim. iv. 1.

ment of Christianity in its simple and uncorrupted purity.

The tendency of Christianity, then, is not unfriendly to mankind. If, sometimes, like all other blessings that men have received from Providence, it hath been perverted and abused, yet its general operation has been, and must still farther prove, salutary and good; if, as Christ foretold, the sword of the Christian has been sometimes wielded in defiance of the restrictions of Christianity, that sword shall ultimately be converted into an instrument beneficial to mankind. The armour of God, furnished to his disciples, is to enable them "to stand against the wiles of the devil;" to "wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."* Variance and discord may be the casual result of the introduction of that law which rebukes the follies, and would correct the sins, of mankind; but the still voice of inspired wisdom must finally be heard; the admonitions of a peaceful monitor must ultimately prevail. That which is "set for the fall and rising again of many, and for a sign, which shall be spoken against," must, in the end, overpower the strength of human opposition, and confound the reasonings of human wisdom. The church, which has been assailed by so many difficulties, and against which, as founded on a rock, the gates of hell cannot prevail, will ultimately "be lifted up," and unfold "its

* Ephes. vi. 11, 12.

everlasting doors," in a triumphant state, when Christ "the King of glory shall come in;" "and there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, or worketh abomination, or a lie, but they which are written in the book of life."*

Christ himself was despitefully insulted and mocked. He suffered, and was crucified, for transgressions which he did not commit; and his religion also has been calumniated and condemned for imputed evil. Amidst reviling, however, and apparent ignominy, our Saviour displayed a triumph on the cross; and appeared, after his victory, with gracious and friendly aspect, to receive and to reflect honour and glory on mankind: so likewise his religion sustains its character, undegraded by false accusation and malignant charges, and will hereafter exhibit to the world the unsullied majesty of its divine perfection.

Wherever science begins to dawn, there Christianity also sheds its rising beams; wherever science has long shone, there Christianity likewise diffuses a steady light, which shall finally disperse every cloud and shadow that mistaken apprehensions have raised up to encircle it; ignorance and prejudice flee away from its presence; despotism, and cruelty, and guilt, shrink from its awful sight.

As the lessons of Christianity are admitted by gradual propagation in the Western Continent, they awaken the rude and untutored Indians from the night of darkness, raise them in the scale of created

* Psalm xxiv. 7—10. Rev. xxi. 26, 27.

beings, excite their highest faculties, and call forth all those social affections which tend to civilise and improve mankind. The cheerless regions of Africa glow at length with the imparted rays of Revelation; and the naked and harassed inhabitants of its deserts hail them as the signal of freedom and improvement to their unhappy tribes.

The more polished and enlightened inhabitants of the east, where revelations were first communicated to mankind, and where the principles of divine truth still remain, interwoven with spurious pretensions, and encumbered with fictitious additions, are prepared for the reception of the true faith, and must finally yield to its convincing power.* The absurd and complicated theology of the Gentoos, with its painful austerities and pernicious superstitions, must fade before the bright and reasonable evidence of Christianity, when that evidence shall be earnestly and judiciously presented. The dominion

* White's Bampton Lectures, Tenth Sermon. The religion of Mahomet acknowledges the authority of Moses and of Christ as true prophets; and the doctrines of the Brahmans, which are established from the Ganges to the extremities of Japan and Turkey, with only such variations as time and climate and accidental circumstances may have produced, admit the existence of one God; the immortality of the soul; many moral virtues, and many religious traditions, consistent with and ratified by Christianity, which, when formerly introduced, made a rapid progress in the East, and which, but for the misconduct of its missionaries, might apparently have been firmly established. In 1558 there were 1,800,000 Christians in Japan. See Sketches relating to History, Religion, &c. of the Hindoos, vol. ii. Sketch 13.

and tyranny of the false prophet, established by the sword, shall finally bow its impious and ambitious crescent to the cross; and the fabrications of imposture fall from the solid edifice founded by Moses, the prophets, and the Redeemer of mankind.

Christianity, then, as it spreads, will overturn the superstitions and bigotry of other religions: it will disperse the sullen shades and gloomy devotion of barbarous climes; and it will vindicate its genuine truth from the fictions and inventions of more refined theologies.

In civilised and enlightened countries, the fabrics of human error have been undermined, as the assumptions of human authority in points of faith have been disclaimed. The authentic records of our religion, collated, and restored to their genuine character and exclusive pre-eminence, must finally conciliate a general and sincere assent. Then shall truth triumph with unresisted evidence, scepticism shall be abashed, and heresy shall be trodden under feet. That sharp and spiritual sword, that goeth out of the mouth "of the word of God," shall then discomfit the nations assembled against his saints. The beast and the false prophet shall be cast alive into a lake of fire, and Satan himself, the great instigator to evil, be cast into the bottomless pit. All nations shall then join in united worship: all people shall assemble with associate praise. Then, as the Psalmist, in prophetic description, concludes his inspired prayers, Christ shall "judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment. He

shall beat in pieces the oppressor. In his days shall the righteous flourish. He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. All kings shall fall before him; all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor, also, and him that hath no helper. His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen." *

* See Psalm lxxii.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

[CONCLUDED].

LUKE, i. 78, 79.

Whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.

HAVING, in a former discourse, considered the evils that appear to have attended the propagation and establishment of Christianity, and shown that they cannot, with any truth or justice, be ascribed to that religion, but must be attributed to the perverse and corrupt passions of men, it may be proper to point out in what respect Christianity has been indisputably serviceable to the world.

In the consideration of this subject, it will be easy, by an obvious distinction, first, to illustrate the beneficial effects of Christianity, in a description of the evils from which it has rescued us; and, secondly, to point out, by a representation of the good that it has conferred, in how great and important interests it has promoted the welfare and happiness of mankind.

To have a complete and just idea of the evils

from which Christianity has rescued us, we should take a view of the religion and manners which prevailed at its first introduction. On a general and unprejudiced survey of pagan times, we find only religions formed on imperfect traditional information, and gradually degraded into abject superstition and pernicious idolatries. The religions which were founded on human terrors, and built up by artifice, with a superstructure of falsehood, of omens, auguries, prodigies, and oracles, which were supported by the pretensions of judicial astrology, and the arts of conjectural divination, or the suggestions of evil spirits, could excite only a perverted and corrupt service. A mythology, woven and spread out by fiction, could be displayed but to generate, in its beholders, erroneous and prejudicial sentiments; and the fanciful and attractive colourings in which it was worked, served but to increase the mischief of its deceptions: its familiar and corporeal imagery rendered it acceptable to vulgar apprehension; while the elegance and poetical ornament of its contexture, and the philosophical explication of its allegories, softened the grossness of the machinery to more refined imaginations. Fascinated to reverence every object of capricious admiration, the judgment of men became vitiated: passions were idolised, and popular vices were embodied and consecrated for worship. In countries the most civilised and instructed, the objects of adoration were detestable; they were worshipped with human sacrifices, and honoured by sanguinary and savage spectacles.

The consequence of such religions could not but be an extreme corruption of manners; and it is certain, that the Scripture representations of the heathen wickedness are not exaggerated. They are confirmed, indeed, by heathen accounts, not only by those of poets and satirists, but by the fair confessions of historical testimony. The pagan world, "given up unto vile affections, committed all iniquity with greediness;" and the most flagitious crimes that have ever disgraced our nature were displayed, not by solitary and detested individuals, but under the sanction of a religion, of which the rites and mysteries were profligate, and the festivals and public celebrations licentious.*

Neither was it the gross and popular religion alone that misled mankind to erroneous and corrupt conduct. Philosophy, which appears sometimes to have stolen its fire from heaven, to have borrowed from the scattered pages of Divine wisdom, yet, in its refined and studied speculations, justified, at different times, every folly and sin that corruption engendered. To riot in licentious indulgence, to wrap up in selfish apathy, to reject external control, to gratify personal resentment, and to reduce all morality to opinion, were, at different times, the maxims of different sects. The exposure of weak infants was publicly authorised, by theorists, ignorant of the true value of human life, and regardless

* The temples exposed and demolished by Constantine were the scenes of every species of public debauchery. See Euseb. de Vit. Constant. lib. iii. c. 54—58.

of the utility of mental exertions for the benefit of others. Slaves, who had survived the power of active service, and the harsh cruelties of the treatment which they experienced, were callously left to perish.* Unfeeling and insulting triumphs were displayed with ostentatious emulation. Falsehood†, suicide, and polygamy, and many horrible and unnatural vices, were allowed and vindicated.

In the subversion of a system so pernicious, Christianity effected immediate benefit. The few sages whose minds were enlightened by the dawn of true wisdom were sensible that without a Divine Revelation no general reform could be expected; and wherever Christianity was communicated, it effected its hoped-for benefit. It relieved mankind from wandering by the glimmerings of traditional knowledge; from a religion of ceremonies and servile superstition to a religion of virtue, purity, and substantial reformation. It subdued the haughtiness of human pride, restrained the licentious sensuality of heathen appetites, and expelled the grossness of heathen principles. It drew over the corruption of mankind a veil of decency. It softened the rugged and brutal passions which prevailed, by introducing a courtesy and urbanity of manners. It brake the fetters of slavery, as it now desires to

* The Roman masters had the power of life and death over their slaves, till the humanity of Adrian withdrew the dangerous authority. See Adrian, in Hist. August. Script. c. xviii. p. 169.

† Whitby on Ephes. iv. 25.

remove its remaining chains.* It threw down the barriers of prejudice, and the narrow distinctions of national pride. It discountenanced hatred and revenge, and brought forth the spirit of universal charity, to move, as did the Spirit of God at the first creation, when the earth was without form, and void, on the face of the waves of a troubled world, overshadowed by darkness, and agitated by storms.

Christianity, then, must be allowed to have removed away the pollution of much evil, and to have composed, from the confusion and jarring elements of disorder, a system of arrangement and harmony that is "very good." He who is not biassed by any passions to contemplate that religion in an unfavourable point of view, will, on examining its first origin, find it to have been also the cause of genuine and efficient benefit to mankind; and farther tracing its operation in different periods, will see it acting with powerful and beneficial effect in every age.

Christianity, in its first appearance, by unfolding the true character and inscrutable attributes of God,

* The number of slaves is stated, by some historians, to have been equal to that of the free inhabitants of the Roman world. The Christian emperors enacted many laws to check the capricious tyranny of the masters of the slaves. Robertson observes, that the humane spirit of religion struggled long in this respect with the maxims and manners of the world, and contributed more than any other circumstance to introduce the practice of manumission; and he proves this by a long deduction of particulars, and by a reference to many documents. See View of the State of Europe, Note 20.

and the real nature and condition of man, instructed mankind in a reasonable and acceptable service. By revealing the promises of life and immortality, and by stamping the assurance with positive ratification, in the resurrection of its Founder, Christianity opened the prospect of a future judgment, and of a final dispensation. It pointed out the means of obtaining eternal happiness, and shed a divine light on the economy and arrangements of the present world. It confirmed the hopes, and enlivened the expectations, of mankind; and furnished them with joyful considerations, that might animate and support them in every vicissitude of life. It established the only foundation on which resignation and contentment can be built, removing the sandy basis of a philosophy, defective in itself, and recommended on inadequate motives.

As the light of religion was diffused, its important influence was experienced. It at first shone brightly in the inspired zeal and fortitude, in the exemplary and distinguished sanctity, of its apostles and early teachers, who contemplated the living example and walked in the recent footsteps of their great leader. It displayed its effects in the internal concord, and in the unprecedented charities and associate virtues, of small communities, to an extent proverbial and exemplary, and which excited the admiration of its enemies; till at length, by gradual propagation, it spread its efficacy through the constitution of every community where its instructions were preached.*

* Jortin's Remarks, tom. ii. Even Julian commended the conduct of the Christians as exciting admiration; Misapog.

In every country in which Christianity gradually reared its peaceful and conciliating form, we find it strengthen the pillars of society, confirming the relations and invigorating the connexions of life; combining religious sanctions with civil obligations; introducing order, temperance, gratitude, fidelity, forbearance, harmony; giving energy to obedience; enforcing, by conscience, what external regulations could not reach; exciting virtues which political authority could not claim; uniting mankind in closer ties, and animating them to the exertion of every social and every friendly affection.

Enquire we of historians, however partial, however unfriendly to our religion, however reluctant to reveal the virtues of those who professed the faith of Jesus, and we shall find that the disciples of Christianity have been ever peaceable and patient subjects. Submissive, even under governments the most intolerant and oppressive, they silently cultivated a persecuted faith, recommended it only by the practice and communication of its precepts, joined in no factious resistance to established authorities, conspired in no turbulent or seditious schemes, exaggerated no grievances, nor joined in the clamours of popular discontent. From its first appearance, the Christian spirit interferes with no

p. 99. And Gibbon mentions the pure and austere morals of the Christians among the causes which he supposes to have contributed to the growth of the Christian church. He elsewhere also observes, that even the faults, or rather errors, of the Christians were derived from an excess of virtue.

lawful claims of human authority. It renders to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; tribute to whom tribute is due. The Roman magistrate, in his persecution, charges it with no factious contrivance. It consents to suffer rather than excite dangerous commotions, or forfeit due and incumbent allegiance. It gains ascendancy by its own excellence; and, when countenanced by imperial protection, confers ornament and advantage on the powers with which it is combined.

Christianity, which first published its mild decrees in the stillness and calm of universal peace, endeavoured to establish, on permanent principles, the concord and harmony of mankind. It discouraged the wild ardour of conquest, teaching that victory is subject to the control of the Lord of Hosts, before whom "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance;" as "less than nothing, and vanity." It discountenanced the pride of power, exhibiting, in the instructive records to which it appealed, nations overthrown, and kingdoms destroyed; and leading ambition to contemplate the broken image of dominion, consumed, in prophetic description, by that stone which shall ultimately fill the earth.* It held up then awful instruction against that lust of power which had led the fourth kingdom to ravage and tyrannise over the earth with its iron sway, and which was then tottering with its own bulk to weakness and division.

* Dan. ii. 31—35.

Amidst the destruction which overwhelmed the Roman world, involving flourishing cities and dependent nations in its fate, when "hail and fire, mingled with blood, were cast upon the earth," the Christian church alone presented an hallowed and respected sanctuary: firm in its foundations, it fell not with the surrounding powers; and though polluted by the introduction of human inventions, it still preserved characters of a Divine original, which broke through the Gothic structures of superstition, discouraged the intrusion of violence within its peaceful boundaries, and kept alive that religious spirit which alone could counteract the ferocious passions that then domineered in the earth.

The awful presence of religion often opposed itself against the fury of invading conquerors. Its merciful voice was heard sometimes to plead, with effectual supplication, against the rapacious and exterminating rage of those barbarians who over-ran the empire. Amidst devastation and rapine, the prelates of Christianity were active to spread their robes over the fallen, to rescue their possessions from the flames of conquest, and to raise up asylums for the wretched in scenes of desolation and distress.*

* The interposition of Leo the First preserved the city of Rome from the destructive sword of the Huns. The same pontiff obtained from the Vandal Genseric that, in the second sack of Rome, the persons and houses of the citizens should be spared, which they were, as much as possible, amidst the confusion and havoc of a pillage which continued for fourteen days. He distinguished himself also by endeavours to restore the mischief sustained by the sufferers in the plunder, at the

In the ages which succeeded the subversion of the Roman power, and in the barbarous governments erected on its ruins, we find no rays but what Christianity diffused, no virtues but what Christianity disclosed. If aught of knowledge or of science flourished, it was in religious seclusion. If equity or benevolence withheld the hand of oppression, it was because they were enforced by the persuasive voice of religion. If agriculture and useful arts were encouraged and commended, it was by the patronage and example of those monastic institutions, of which many of the advantages, in dark periods, have been forgotten, in indiscriminate censure of their excess. What but Christianity was that spirit of paternal regard which softened the fierceness of the feudal severity! What were the courtesy and gentleness which mitigated the wild enthusiasm and ferocity of military ages, and introduced a generous forbearance to control the passions of men! What but the suggestions of Christian charity!

Christianity conspired, at these periods, to check private quarrels, and to soften revenge and hostilities between individual chieftains; to abolish the

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same time that the Bishop of Carthage charitably supported an immense number of Roman prisoners, carried into Africa, many of whom were afterwards redeemed, and returned to inhabit their ruined country. See other proofs of great and eminent virtues, which raised ecclesiastics above their contemporaries, in Denina delle Rivoluzioni d'Italia, lib. v. c. 4. and Cave's Primitive Christianity, part iii. c. 2.

absurd trial by judicial combat, and to divest even war itself of cruelty and of the half of its horrors.

The wisdom and benevolence likewise of our religion, in proportion as they were transfused into the civil laws and regulations of society, introduced a more conciliating policy, and a more faithful attachment*; for though Christianity prescribe no form of civil constitution, nor would, by subverting the various systems that prevail, reduce all governments to the same modification, yet in proportion as its principles are adopted, they meliorate and improve every constitution. The laws of Christianity restrain alike oppression and revolt; religious and civil liberty combine in essential union; they flourish under the same protection; they perish by the same wounds; a veneration of God, and a charity for man, are the great foundations on which justice, subordination, and peace, must be founded. The principles of religion are steady and unchangeable. The legislator who respects them will sacrifice no lasting interests for temporary objects. The schemes of policy which have been devised in opposition to them, however they may have amused the fancies of men, have been found transient and unsound. Reflection hath condemned, and experience hath bewailed them.

Very interesting and important proofs of the

* The canon law was formed on principles of general equity, and directed by consistent and determinate rules, when civil jurisprudence was established on the worst and most exceptionable grounds.

divine character and salutary operation of Christianity may be derived from a consideration of that wisdom by which it is adapted to universal establishment, and contributes to promote the universal welfare. In comparing its influence with the effects of other religions, as shown in the present state of the world, under every diversity of climate, government, and manners, we behold every where the bright evidence of heavenly truth, contrasted with the dark and malignant features of falsehood and evil. The pure and upright spirit of a divine law bends not, like the contrivance of imposture, in accommodation to acquired habits, or to local customs and temptations. It seeks to counteract the seduction of pernicious example, and would stem the torrent of prevailing corruption. It flatters not the passions nor humours the prejudices of men, but inculcates a firm and steady fortitude, unyielding to circumstances, unsubdued by the infection of surrounding manners.

The liberal and diffusive benevolence of UNIVERSAL CHARITY breathes sentiments far different from the churlish and contracted principles inspired by the superstitions of imposture. The considerate and friendly maxims of Christianity blend themselves with the policy of governments, but to lower the pride of pre-eminence, and to plead the claims of subjection. The faith of the lowly and crucified Jesus, rejected by nations where despotism and ignorance prevail, incorporates itself with the government of civilised and enlightened countries;

conspiring with the temperate exertions of freedom; casting away the fetters which tyranny and superstition have imposed, and which still confine in darkness the nations subjected to their control; promoting, with zealous industry, that diffusion of knowledge which enables mankind to judge of its pretensions; exciting the free exercise of the intellectual powers to the discovery of truth; raising the mind to sublime studies and interesting contemplations; stimulating it to the attainment of every moral and spiritual perfection; and awakening the aculties of an immortal being to an attention to his eternal interests.

It is the effect of superstition to deaden the powers, and to depress the industry, of men; but the religion of Christ stirs up its disciples to an active and animated obedience; bids them mingle with society for the exertion of friendly offices, and for the communication of assiduous charities.

Since the period when Christianity was rescued by the Reformation from disguise, and restored to its true character, its instructions have effected the most salutary and important changes in the opinions and conduct of every people who have received its genuine oracles. The attributes and perfections of God have been proclaimed with fidelity. The condition and expectation, and duties of men, have been described without flattery, or respect to persons. Hence a worship in sincerity and in truth has been established, undebased by barren ceremonies, unencumbered by superfluous parade; and hence a

pattern of the true church has been restored on apostolic principles. Hence the rights of humanity have been taught with a success that daily operates to alleviate the sorrows, and to multiply the enjoyments, of life; to harmonise the tempers, to reconcile the animosities, and to substantiate the concord of mankind.

The appropriation of a SABBATH DAY to religious retirement from secular concerns, and to a performance of the solemn offices of devotion, has a tendency to allay the too great violence of human passions, to abate the ardour of selfish competitions, and to raise the mind to rational piety. The instruction on that day conveyed to ignorance; the reproof held out to sin; the wholesome admonitions and salutary warnings, delivered to every rank of life, undoubtedly contribute to check the inroads of corruption. The restrictions of the day; its reserve and order; its repose and exemption from labour; its decent ornament, and quiet character, produce, even in a political point of view, very beneficial and important discipline and effects to society. Contemplate the appearance, and consider the consequences of the institution, not so much in the dissipated and tumultuous town, as in the sequestered village; observe the associate worship, the decent cheerfulness, the harmony and useful recreation of the day, the consolation which it affords to the aged, and the instruction which it procures, by exhortation and discipline, to the young; and it must be allowed,

that much intrinsic good thence accrues to the community.

The hallowed periods, likewise, and the stated observances instituted by THE CHURCH, in conformity with the spirit and intention of our religion, conspire certainly to the same effect. The days set apart to celebrate the memory of distinguished saints, or of events productive of important benefits to mankind, the festivals of joy and gratitude, and the fasts for penitence and contrite affliction of the soul, cannot but operate in subserviency to the great design of our existence; they awaken serious reflections, animate piety to its most lively emotions, and exercise the virtues, of which they recall the consecrated remembrance and effect.

If, in communities, and extended circles of society, the influence of religion hath been shown thus salutary, its principles will be found to have been equally advantageous in private application. In the great display of history we are not often presented with the picture of private life; but in the particular detail of many eminent characters, who have flourished at different periods since the dawn of the Christian era, we find, in the fair description of their conduct, an exemplification of the efficacy of the Christian precepts. Whatever can be conceived of elevation and victory over the world, of true greatness in adversity*, and of forbearance in

* The conduct of those great men who contributed to the establishment of the Reformation in this country, may be mentioned as among some of the most signal proofs of these effects.

success; whatever of generosity can be fancied in disinterested exertion, in self-denial, in liberal and extensive benevolence, hath been frequently displayed in the disciples of Christ. If faith in its holy and aspiring veneration of an all-perfect and all-seeing God — if hope in its humble and assiduous endeavours to obtain an immortal recompence — if charity, in its various and enlarged designs,—if these be lovely in themselves, and beneficial in their tendency to mankind, they have ever accompanied and characterised the presence of genuine Christianity.

The natural operation of religion, in private as in public life, is to awaken and regulate the affections, and to encourage, on disinterested principles, the cultivation of social virtues. In the various ties and complicated relations which result from our connection in civilised life, it holds out a rule of conduct, of which all ages, since its revelation, have conspired to celebrate the excellence, of which all descriptions of men, however they may differ as to doctrinal and speculative points of faith, agree to commend the morality; which addresses the inmost sentiments, and regulates the secret thoughts; which appeals to our judgment, and to our heart, not by a languid detail of speculative precepts, but by the most animated and impressive lessons, illustrated by example, and enforced by every motive interesting and affecting to mankind; a rule which fluctuates not with the caprices of popular opinion, which bows to no prevalent principles, nor accommodates itself in conformity to any system, but which, on steady

and secure grounds, defines the duties, and marks out the great and essential interests, of man. Such a rule might be supposed, in theory, to promote some good, where it should be established; and this, by experience, it hath been found to do. Men are not so perversely wicked as to recede from excellence in proportion as it is discovered, or to turn to evil because instructed to foresee its consequences and punishment.

Still, if it be enquired why greater effects have not been produced by Christianity, and why a purity of manners, in some degree correspondent with the perfection of that law, does not generally prevail, it must be answered, that it is owing to that corruption of our nature, of which Christianity has revealed the source and pointed out the remedy. The amendment of our manners has not been in proportion to the excellency of the instruction which we have received, but still much amendment has been produced; and if our manners be compared with those of any unenlightened people that have formerly existed, or that now do exist, they will be found to be eminently superior.

The conduct of individuals also will be allowed, on fair examination, to be in general more commendable in proportion as they have seriously and sincerely accepted religion as an unerring teacher and guide. If those who most loudly call themselves Christ's disciples have sometimes most glaringly violated his laws, it is not difficult to distinguish affected reverence from real attachment: but, usu-

ally, a faith in the merits of our Saviour shines forth in humble imitation of his excellences.

If those who are professionally dedicated to the sacred office of preaching the religion of Christ have been accused of exhibiting no adequate holiness of life, the accusation, though admitted, would not invalidate their claim to the reputation of higher and more exemplary conduct than any other description of men has displayed. What, if the perfection of the law, and of its great Teacher, will admit of no comparison with the conduct of their immediate servants; and if the teachers of righteousness, when jealously watched, are found wanting, because they are judged by the standard of undeviating rectitude, what conclusions can we thence draw, but such as are rather favourable to the law than injurious to the character of its ministers?

They who, unsubdued by the accumulated evidence of Christianity, have rejected it as a rule of life, have sufficiently betrayed the weakness of their judgment in deciding on the most momentous principles of conduct. They have scoffed at excellence because they have not understood its value; or they have affected superiority by censuring what all the instructed part of mankind have agreed to approve; and what, perhaps, they themselves, in practice, delighted to display; thus refuting, by their conduct, the absurdity of their own maxims.*

* Celsus objected to Christianity, that it taught patience under insult; Bayle, upon similar grounds, vindicated revenge; and Tyndal disapproved of the forgiveness of injuries. Hume

That men of enlarged understandings are capable of forming erroneous opinions upon subjects most interesting and important to mankind, is certain. Genius is accustomed to consider in an exaggerated point of view whatever it generates or acquires. A love of new and strange opinions disposes it to credulity. It adopts with eagerness, and retains with pertinacious adherence. Hence the numberless theories which are daily engendered by active imaginations. Hence the new systems which are daily erected on hollow and unsubstantial grounds, and decorated with every embellishment that partiality and invention can furnish. Christianity, by disclosing the criterion by which we may judge of these, enables us to guard against the delusive representations which men of great and captivating talents hold out. It teaches us to anticipate the fall of those fabrics which are erected but for temporary effect; and exhibits truth as alone retaining its permanent lustre and establishment.

If, in every great and momentous point which affects the happiness of mankind, we are furnished with clear and decided opinions, let us remember that it is to Christianity we are indebted for the instruction. If false virtues have been divested of their imposing splendour; if humble and decried qualities have been raised to deserved estimation;

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thought humility and self-denial useless; and we have often seen, that they who reject the evidence of Christianity, are easily led to dispute the most obvious principles of natural religion.

if characters, which the mistaken admiration of mankind consecrated as glorious, have, by just estimation, been exhibited as objects of horror, and the reverence of men been directed to useful and honourable examples, it was Christianity that reformed the opinions of the world. If prosperity hath been taught to feel, and abasement encouraged to hope; if success has been tutored to moderation, and affliction been cheered to patience; it hath been from the suggestions of that Counsel which threatens the elevation of the proud, and associates itself in friendly consolation with the distressed. Where, then, is wisdom that religion hath not inspired? Where is the virtue that religion hath not taught?

The strengthened ties of kindred bear testimony to the efficacy of Christianity. Its precepts are transcribed in the extension of the social charities; in the reciprocal deeds of filial and parental love; in the offices of kindness to neighbours and dependents; in the attention to the discipline of youth, and the virtues of rising generations; in the condescension of the great, and in the submission of the lowly; in the exertions of manly and fraternal friendship; in the chastened affections and mild assiduities of female tenderness. What law but that of Christianity can unite society in one extended bond of charity? Where, but in Christian countries, has been kept alive the flame of universal love? Where else has been raised the house for indigence, the hospital for disease, the school for ignorance, the shelter for infirmity and age?

Wherever Christianity is obeyed, there it must awaken the best sensibilities of the human heart, call forth its virtues, and repress its evil propensities. In proportion as its influence is weakened on the minds of men, however civilised, so much do they glide into depravity. As the restraint is withdrawn, the corruption of human nature appears, and we become disposed to commit whatever sins our uncontrolled passions suggest. If that corruption can be effectually counteracted; if resentment and envy can be softened; if pride, lust, and intemperance can be controlled and reined in; if the love of peace should seek to allay the passions, and to calm the dissensions of mankind, it must be from the operation of that spirit which he, who was the "Prince of peace," communicated; which philosophy may adopt, but did not generate.

The full efficacy of religion, however, still remains to be seen, and will be gradually experienced as it shall be more extensively and more perfectly established. As "the glory of the Lord shines round about," "peace on earth, and good-will towards men," may be proclaimed. Wherever vigilance and simplicity abide, there the good tidings of great joy are gladly received.* Wherever reason and experience listen, there the power of the Divine word must produce its effect.† The diffidence of the shepherd accepts its communications with praise.‡ The wisdom of the sage bows in adoration of its

* Luke, ii. 8—14. † Id. ii. 46, 47.
‡ Id. ii. 20.

Teacher.* As the precepts of Christianity are delivered in sincerity, and in truth, they spread wide a diffusion of useful knowledge. The benevolent sentiments of universal philanthropy, which are now professed by those who would recommend new theories, are derived from an acquaintance with the moral maxims of Christianity. They are to be found in no earlier code than the inspired volume, and are first registered in sacred characters. When the peaceful days which speculative philosophy, in imitation of prophetic description, foretells, shall be established in the world, it must be by the extension of that Christian spirit which shall guide the passions, and restrain the lusts of mankind. If, as in new schemes is promised, "nation shall no longer lift up sword against nation, neither learn war any more," if "swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks," it must be, not by the operation of a self-sufficient and overweening philosophy, which would supersede the Teacher from whom its knowledge has been derived, but by the gradual influence of that law which went forth from Zion, and from the word of the Lord, which proceeded from Jerusalem.†

To the universal establishment of that law in purity, and to its vital operation in sincerity and truth, it is the interest and duty of every man to labour and co-operate. In the private example of its excellence, all may display their zeal; in the public propagation of its principles, few are they

* Matt. ii. 1—11. † Isaiah, ii. 3, 4.

who cannot contribute: by attention to domestic instruction, by encouragement of public seminaries, by distribution of religious works, and by contribution to religious institutions. In proportion as Christianity prevails, so will righteousness and peace be established. As we labour to enlarge and confirm its authority, we contribute to the advancement of that kingdom for which we daily pray; and recommend ourselves to the favour of that Lord who hereafter shall deal out righteous and inexorable judgments to the world.

SAMUEL PARR, LL. D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S, CURATE OF HATTON, &c.
BORN 1746-7. DIED 1825.

From his "*Works* (vol. v. p. 641. vol. vi. p. 592.), with *Memoirs of his Life and Writings; and a Selection from his Correspondence; by John Johnstone, M. D. &c.*" Longman, Rees, & Co.

In the selection of the two following Sermons, I have been influenced as much from a consideration of the subjects themselves, as from the manner in which they are treated by their learned and eloquent author. The first is a rare specimen (considering the character of the author from whom it is chosen) of compression of matter and brevity of style. It is among the shortest and least elaborated of Dr. Parr's Discourses. It is also among the most luminous and satisfactory in its treatment of the subject selected. The second Sermon may be considered a fair specimen of the Author's mode of treatment of one of the most vital subjects of Christianity: and exhibits a happy example of diffusiveness without wearisomeness, and of argument without dogmatism. A strain of piety, and of anxious and earnest persuasion, runs throughout the whole; while, in the humble estimation of the editor of this work, the view, taken of the important subject itself, appears to be the RIGHT one.

THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

MATTHEW, xxii. 14.

For many are called, but few are chosen.

THE detached portions of parables are frequently, and, I think, properly, compared to the materials of a building, which, viewed from a just distance, and placed in that nice arrangement where the symmetry of parts gives effect to a whole, impress upon the mind the clearest and most captivating idea of beauty and order; but torn asunder, retain every gross and hideous form which the most undisciplined imagination can conceive, or the most unskilful hand can execute. Thus, in the parable of the marriage feast there is a regular unity of design, to which all the circumstances enumerated in it are in various degrees subservient, and in reference to which the words of the text have a very marked and consummate propriety; but, separately considered, they have been the occasion of racking disquietude, and error almost insuperable to many minds, bewildered by superstition, or involved in ignorance. For they have been supposed to contain the most direct and

explicit testimony in favour of predestination — so direct and explicit, that no criticism can invalidate, and no sophistry explain it away. Of you, who now hear me, it would be uncharitable, and even indecorous, to suppose that any are enslaved to an absurd and pernicious doctrine which not only shakes the fundamental proofs of natural religion, but lessens all the moral obligations of revealed. Yet, as some uneasiness and some uncertainty may dwell in the bosoms of those who, while they shrink from the general notion, are staggered by particular evidences adduced to uphold it, I shall set before you a plain and instructive illustration of the parable to which these words are annexed, and then by refuting the supposed connection in which they do not, and laying open the real connection in which they do, stand with the context, I shall endeavour to soften those harsh features of the text itself, which at first sight, I am aware, are so perplexing to the illiterate, and so alarming to the pious.

It may not be improper, however, to state two preliminary observations, which may assist us in gaining a clear and exact view of such other passages, as resemble the doctrine conveyed, or the terms employed, in the parable that lies before us. Now, according to the appropriate and consistent language of Scripture, the kingdom of the Father is, I think, often distinguished from the kingdom of the heavens. The one expression seems to be of Jewish, the other of Christian origin: the one points to the final state of good men ; the other to

that religious dispensation, which qualifies them for obtaining, and encourages them in hoping for it. In the second place, I would observe, that the imagery of a feast is used by the sacred writers to signify both; and it may not be impertinent to add, that this phraseology is not peculiar to the Scriptures; for, without calling in the aid of similar passages which occur in several Greek poets, and in an ancient Greek philosopher, I think it sufficient to remind you that Virgil, in one of his eclogues, and Horace, in one of his odes, have adopted the same metaphor, in describing the exalted state of those persons who, from the splendour of their characters, were admitted into the presence of the gods.

We now proceed to the state of the parable — to explain its various parts, and thus gradually lead you into the fair and full import of the text itself.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a feast, which a king (or rather, a nobleman) had made for his son. His servants are sent to call them who were bidden, and they would not come. Again, he sends forth other servants, who in terms of stronger importunity endeavoured to hasten their arrival, and who, in the most engaging forms of description, represented the oxen and fatlings as killed, and all things as ready. But one went to his farm, another to his merchandise, and the rest were so unmoved by the kindness, and so unawed by the authority, of him who invited them, that they treated spitefully, and even barbarously slew, his servants. The king,

with just and terrible rage, sent forth his armies, and slew them. The wedding, says he, is ready, but they who were bidden are not worthy. Go ye into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. They gather the good and the bad, and the wedding is furnished with guests. One man, however, had not on a wedding garment. The king commands him to be cast into outer darkness. Then follows the text: "for many are called, but few are chosen."

Now the kingdom of heaven implies the Gospel published by Jesus Christ, enlightened by his doctrine, confirmed by his miracles, adorned by his virtues, and sealed with his most precious blood. The feast represents that kingdom from its primary institution, through all its successive stages, up to its final completion. The servants first sent are Moses and the prophets, who followed him in the early parts of the Jewish economy, and by whom the minds of the Jewish nation were to be prepared by degrees for the brighter hopes and purer laws of the Gospel. They who would not come are the obstinate and stiff-necked Jews, who often relapsed into the impure tenets of polytheism, and the odious ceremonies of idolaters. The servants sent again to invite them are partly the later prophets, in whose writings there are clearer predictions concerning the promised Messiah, and more brilliant descriptions of the glories that were to be displayed in his approaching kingdom; and partly, under the same appellation we must rank our blessed Lord himself,

and his immediate disciples, by whom God's covenanted mercies were more graciously offered, and more authoritatively proclaimed.

They who slew them are the later Jews, who, it seems, were more bigoted even than their forefathers to the dead letter of the law, whose understandings had been perverted by the coarse and mutilated notions of philosophy which they had gathered up during the captivity, and whose spirits were rendered more stubborn and more ferocious by the temporary suspension of their religious and civil immunities. Hence they turned a deaf ear to the mild and courteous invitations, and even to the solemn and awful remonstrances, of our holy Redeemer. They imputed his wonderful acts of power and mercy to the agency of Beelzebub. They dragged the Saviour of the world to an ignominious death on the cross; and they harassed with unrelenting severity all who were melted by his benevolence, all who were astonished at his wisdom, and all who in the gloomy hour of persecution yet adhered to his cause. When the king is said to send forth his armies, we are to understand that God made the Romans the instruments of his offended justice upon the Jews; for, after many contentions and much bloodshed, a siege of Jerusalem was commenced, in the course of which, and the war immediately preceding it, no less than eleven hundred thousand men are known to have perished, amidst the distresses of famine and the havoc of the sword. After this, God sent his servants into the

highways, and directs them to ask all whom they should find; for he was unwilling that so noble and costly an entertainment should be prepared in vain. That is, the Apostles and first propagators of Christianity are commissioned to go into the Gentile world, in order to spread wider the tidings of salvation; and the heathens, it seems, to whom this invitation was first addressed, were not so negligent and ungrateful as the Jews, to whom it had been repeatedly offered. They came from the east and the west, and from the north and the south: the fiery African, the luxurious Asiatic, the ferocious German, the fastidious Greek, and the imperious Roman, embraced the benevolent proffer of everlasting happiness, and bowed the knee before the cross of their Saviour. Thus the Gospel flourished in many countries; it was read in many languages; it was gradually received under the protection of many states;—or, in other words, the wedding was furnished with guests.

And one came in, that had not on a wedding garment. I must here stop to explain some circumstances to which there is a proper and manifest allusion in the parable.

The Jews are known in past, and even in present times, to celebrate their marriages with great splendour. The feasts usually continued six or seven days. Their most intimate friends and nearest relations were bidden. The time of holding them was night; and the custom was for every attendant to wear a purple garment, out of respect to the

parties, and as a mark of the distinction shown to himself by the invitation. Now, as our blessed Lord knew these ceremonies well, and as he addressed the parable to those who practised them, no room was left for misapprehension in their minds; and a little attention will equally secure us from mistake. The want of a wedding garment, considered in reference to one who came in from the highways, implies a wavering, a languid, or corrupt faith, the want of a steady spirit, or an honest heart. The person who wanted it was one of the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel was preached after it had been rejected by the Jews. The sentence of driving him into outer darkness implies the punishment, whatever it might be, which was due to his crimes. And then follows the text, which says, not only in relation to those who came in last, but to those who would not come in at all, "many are called, but few are chosen." Here, however, I must beg of you to observe, that the expression of outer darkness does not necessarily imply the gloomy and wretched mansions of the damned. But how can this be? Outer darkness, you will say, is terrible to the imagination, and the terrors of the description are heightened by what our Lord adds,—"there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Very true; but the allusion is yet preserved to Jewish customs: it signifies the darkness that was out of the house, within which the wedding is celebrated with a display of grandeur, and in cheerfulness of heart. Hence the gnashing of teeth emphatically and

exactly describes the extreme mortification of a guest, who, wishing to partake of the feast, and having entered into the room, was rejected from it with every aggravated indignity, for the want of a proper qualification. So that the expression of darkness does not surely mean the darkness of hell, but the darkness of night, in which the degraded and expelled guest was condemned to wander. We are required by every rule of fair criticism to explain and limit the expression by the allusive spirit in which the parable is related; and we are forbidden, I think, by our religious reverence, as well as by our natural sensibilities, to force the text into a severer meaning. Mistake me not. I have no wish to colour over the guilt of him who had not on a wedding garment, and I shall not attempt to appreciate the exact degree of rigour in his punishment. Far be it from me to soothe the fears of any sinner; but, in pointing those fears to their proper object, and stretched up to their proper tone, I give them a fuller, a more permanent, and a more salutary effect. I attend to the real constitution of human nature, and I do not contradict the letter or the spirit of the word of God.

I must desire you, moreover, to mark the various gradations, and discriminating circumstances, of guilt recorded in the parable. Upon those to whom the invitation was offered, and by whom it was first refused, we do not hear that any punishment was inflicted. When the Deity did not suffer his gracious purpose to be impeded by the unfeeling and un-

thankful conduct of his creatures, he repeats his invitation in stronger terms; and, behold, the ingratitude of man seems to rise in proportion to the goodness of God. The second offer was not merely rejected, but the rejection is accompanied by overt acts of most unmerited and violent cruelty to those who delivered it. Even the crime which is mentioned last in the order of the narrative, was not the blackest in point of criminality. Great, doubtless, was the guilt of coming without a wedding garment; but the guilt of slaying the king's servants was greater. Accordingly, the punishment of the one was only to be driven ignominiously from the feast; but the punishment of the other was, that the king sent forth his armies and destroyed them.

Now, as you do not suppose the torments of eternity to be meant by the latter words, is it fair and consistent to suppose them implied in the former, which are less severe?

The plain truth is, that in neither case the future judicial dispensations of God are directly pointed out; but this most intelligible and most useful lesson is conveyed to us:—that when the Deity holds forth his favours in vain,—when we refuse to accept them,—or when, having accepted, we proceed to abuse them, they are withdrawn from us; and, according to our different degrees of guilt, God exercises different degrees of severity.

History records some facts by which we may understand the penalties incurred by those who slew the king's servants; and it were easy to state a sup-

posed case, by which we may judge of the sentence denounced against him who had not on the wedding garment. God has given to us, who are among the last that were admitted to the feast, the bright and steady directions of the Gospel; but should he suffer us again to be plunged in the thick darkness of heathen idolatry, or guided (as countries once professing Christianity are) by the baleful and glimmering light of Mahometanism, would you not think our situation deplorable, though our country should not be destroyed, as that of the Jews was, by a host of invincible enemies, and visited with all the dreadful calamities of war. Surely you would shudder at the prospect of being driven from the feast, though the king should not send his armies among you.

As a further proof that the text does not allude to the last and solemn judgment of all mankind, we may observe, that as one only came in without a wedding garment, the number representing those who in the Gentile world may fall short of the Divine favour is not sufficient; but if we carry back our attention to all the guests who were summoned, and suppose the punishments to be of a temporal nature, then the number of those who resisted the summons justifies the proportion stated in my text, between those who are called and those who are chosen.

After these remarks on the affairs to which the temporal judgments of God were directed, and the gradations by which they are discriminated, I should proceed to explain what my text *does* mean, as a general inference from the whole, were it not

proper for me previously to observe what it does *not* mean, considered as connected only with the fate of the person who had not a wedding garment. Where then, let us ask, do we hear that the man was predestinated to his offence; or that he is condemned for any involuntary and inevitable sin? He knew that he ought to have had on a wedding garment—he came without it, and the fault was palpably and solely his own; but he was not cast out in consequence of any arbitrary and irreversible decree on the part of the king. He that asked meant to have entertained him; he that called would also have chosen him, if he had been properly prepared. But, exclaims the predestinarian, he that is once called is saved for ever; for the call is accompanied by appropriate and unequivocal indications that it comes from God—by an unshaken affiance that our sins are forgiven—by an efficacious grace that sanctifies our actions. In opposition to all these groundless assumptions, and all this senseless jargon, I bring forward the plain declaration of the text, and distorted, even as the predestinarian himself would wish to have it, in its application, and referred only to the case of him who had not a wedding garment—for he certainly was called, and he as certainly was not chosen. Now, if you do not allow the distinction, that a man may be called and yet not be chosen, you abandon, or rather demolish, a text which stands among the strongest outworks of predestination, and perhaps is more tenable than the citadel itself. If you do allow the distinction, and add that God pro-

fesses to call those whom he does not intend to choose—that he who foresees and determines the event, has also prepared the train of causes which are to produce it—that he excites hopes which he will not permit us to gratify, and sports with the weakness of his creatures under the colour of punishing their sins,—to what does this amount? My indignation and horror at the doctrine do not carry me, I hope, beyond the reverence which is due to the Being who is the subject of it, when I say, that it imputes to the deity the forms of judicial proceedings without the spirit of justice itself—the baseness of treachery, without its dexterity—the malignity of cruelty, without the provocations or interests which impel other beings to be cruel—the wantonness of oppression, without the dignity of power.

Were we to grant the premises, that the concluding words in the parable have a retrospect only to the person who was found not to wear a wedding garment, and his companions, the reasons already adduced are sufficient to crush every consequence that favours the vulgar notions of unconditional election. And surely we do not press our analogical argument too far, when, in conformity to the preceding circumstances of the parable, we contend that the whole relates, not to the final doom of mankind, but to the religious dispensations of the Deity, in the publication of a law, the privileges of which some men are, and some are not permitted to share —which to some is communicated earlier, and to

others later—which by some is embraced, and by others rejected—which to some, from their moral qualifications, is, and to others, from the want of them, is not the instrument of salvation.

The inconsistencies of ignorance leagued with spiritual pride are endless, and weary reason itself in the career of its triumphs over error. Let us, however, point out one more instance in which the text, upon the principles of those who mistake it, fails to justify the mischievous use to which it is often applied, to the great dismay of well-meaning Christians, and the great dishonour of Christianity itself. For if we should for a moment admit that it does point to a future judgment, the fair and obvious deduction to be made from it is the very reverse of that which rash and misguided enthusiasts are so prone to expect and eager to enforce. Many persons are collected from the highways and the hedges, and even the good and the bad are admitted, and sit down at the feast. But we hear of one, and of one only, who was cast into outer darkness; and this too, not from any arbitrary rejection pronounced by the master of the feast, but through his own voluntary misbehaviour. Now, if only one was cast out, the text does not indirectly countenance the gloomy descriptions and frantic assertions of those, who suppose that they do honour to God, when they represent the greater part of his creatures as cut off from his favour. If only one was cast out, it cannot be said of the persons with whom he sat down, that many are called, but few

are chosen; for of all that were called, according to this hypothesis, all were chosen except one; and for the rejection of this one a specific, an adequate and a just reason is assigned—because he had not on a wedding garment.

In the foregoing interpretation, I have intentionally not availed myself of such aid as might easily be drawn from verbal criticism, or metaphysical distinction. I have spoken in common language the dictates of common sense. From the whole of the parable perspicuously, I hope, and impartially explained, I have reasoned on that which appears to be the meaning of the text; and by comparing the words themselves, even with the part of the parable immediately preceding, I have shown, upon the predestinarian's own limitations, what the meaning cannot be.

In respect to the comparative number of those who will, or will not be saved in the last day, religion does not authorise us to form an unfavourable opinion; and humanity surely inclines us to hope, that as the present life, amidst all its anxious cares, all its galling disappointments, all its moral, all its physical imperfections, is, on the whole, friendly to virtue and happiness, the scenes to be hereafter disclosed will terminate in the greatest possible good to the greater part of our species. As to the fact itself, the Scriptures are silent; and confident I am that the text, either according to the inconsistencies of the interpretation I oppose, or according to the plain and obvious one, which many

approve, furnishes not the slightest information. Instead, therefore, of torturing the words of our Lord in order to support our own wild and fierce decisions about the pains of hell, we should have rather recourse to history, and consider how far the lenient explanation which I have recommended is made probable by the course of God's providence in the religious government of his creatures during the present life.

But the text, you will reply, says plainly and peremptorily, that many are called, and few are chosen. It does so; and in reference to all the parties enumerated in the parable, to those who at various times and in various forms were bidden, the assertion is to me intelligible. Consider how frequently the Jews deserted or violated the law—how long, and how obstinately, they resisted the Gospel; consider how many difficulties obstructed its progress through the countries where it is now believed; consider how many nations yet sit in darkness, and how large a portion of the world which once were blessed with the light, are now deprived of it; and, above all, consider how many who profess it by their words, dishonour it by their actions. But many of you are called, and no wonder is it that few have been yet chosen, when the offers of salvation are so little regarded by those who hear them, and so much slighted by others, who will not listen to them at all.

You see then, that I consider the text as referring to the whole parable; that with this reference there

is nothing very hyperbolical or improbable in the assertion, that few were chosen; and that, according to the opinions of those who would narrow the premises to the condition of the persons who were last bidden, the narrative is at open and direct variance with the conclusion. You see further, that neither from the less punishment of him who was cast into outer darkness for the want of a wedding garment, nor from the greater punishment of those who were destroyed by the king's armies because they had slain his servants, are we authorised to form any minute calculations, or any general hypothesis, on the number of those who will be condemned or rewarded in the great and awful day of judgment; and finally, you see that, as all these offences of all the parties were voluntary, the text cannot, without the most glaring absurdity, and even the most desperate presumption, be pressed into the service of those who call themselves the advocates of election and predestination.

To conclude. It has ever been my fixed persuasion, that in the explanation of parables, the peculiar and distinguishing genius of the composition itself, the main and ultimate views of the speaker, and the local and national circumstances of the audience, should be carefully observed, and that no doctrine of great pith and moment should ever be extorted from particular and detached passages alone. Those passages are sometimes allusive to manners, and clothed with metaphor; they are employed sometimes to decorate, and sometimes to

enforce. They suggest, but rarely establish, some collateral truth. They illustrate the general meaning; they invigorate the general effect; but they occupy too narrow a space, and they are composed of materials too scanty and too brittle, to support those large and irregular and ponderous superstructures which are often heaped upon them by fanatics — by dogmatists — by zealots without knowledge, and bigots without charity. And sure I am, that the text we have just been considering, when wrenched away from the main body of the parable, is not sufficient to form a foundation, so broad and so seated, that we may rest upon it all the complicated and comprehensive principles of God's religious government, and all the eternal interests of all those beings who are the subjects of that government in all countries, both within and without the pale of Christianity, and in all ages, both before and after its publication.

To the great and general scope of parables, therefore, our attention should be chiefly directed; and with the result of this alone, whether it be a precept to regulate our practice, or a proposition to exercise our faith, we should always be contented. Now the evident and direct design of the parable before us is, to show that God's benevolent purposes to establish the Gospel were often counteracted; that the Jews were punished for their contumacious rejection of it; and that though Gentiles are among those who were admitted to the feast, all were not worthy of partaking it. The indirect and

more extensive application of it may show that God is gracious, though man be unthankful; that he offers his favours to all, and that many will not accept them; that his approbation will be conferred on those who entertain a right sense and make a wise use of them, and that the ungrateful or the perverse have no right to expect a continuance of blessings they are too infatuated or too depraved to apply.

What remains for us, my brethren, but to pour forth our fervent prayers, and to exert our most strenuous efforts, that we, who are called among other Christians in this life, may make our calling and election sure in that which is to come.

FAITH AND MORALITY.

1 JOHN, v. 4.

Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.

IN extenuation of the hateful consequences imputed to enthusiasm, we have been told that the panegyrists of faith are not intentionally advocates for immorality, and that their contempt of good works is by no means irreconcilable with their abhorrence of bad. As to the second position, it is utterly incongruous to all the operations of the human mind, which either receives opposite impressions from opposite objects, or is suspended in such a middle state of indifference as often produces inaction, and always excludes perceptions so lively as contempt or abhorrence. The testimony of universal experience must not, therefore, be rashly sacrificed to the affirmations of men who are too prejudiced to investigate the tendency of their own sentiments, too infatuated to disown, or too interested to acknowledge it.

In respect to the first excuse, though plausibly expressed, it may easily be answered. When the

degradation of virtue is said to be blended with the defence of vice, I mean to charge these disputants with doing virtually what they must have renounced common sense, as well as common decency, to have done avowedly. Had they stood forth the open, undisguised apologists for actions that are alike condemned by our moral feelings and intellectual powers, mankind would have been instantly disgusted at the absurdity of such tenets, or shocked at their impiety. Admiration in the warmest of their adherents would have cooled into incredulity; the alarm given to fear would have awakened the judgment from its slumber; every understanding must have perceived the fallacy, and every tongue proclaimed it.

Most readily, therefore, will I acquit our opponents of such violence as would have defeated itself. But there is a wide gulf between this concession and another far more agreeable to their wishes, and more honourable to their reputation. I allow that the dangers which hover over a practice in the system of those who exact faith are more remote, but not on that account less real,—are more indirect in their approach, but not less formidable in their ravages. The great motives of human action you know to be the desire of pleasure, and the fear of pain; but as faith is pronounced to be not incompatible with habits that are supposed to incur pain, and as it disdains the aid of those to which pleasure is usually annexed, it will in some degree disperse the terrors of the wicked, and crush the hopes of

the righteous. In whatever intricacies the debate before us may be perplexed, certain it is, that the same arguments which discourage virtue must ultimately encourage vice. By the uniform progress of our ideas, the hideousness of the one will always be diminished in a contrast with the diminished beauty of the other. According to every rule of justice, any deduction in the recompense of the former requires a proportionate mitigation in the punishment of the latter.

I am at a loss, then, to conceive what purpose can be answered to the enthusiast, or what discredit be brought on his opponents, if we admit the literal meaning of an apology so confidently urged. By pointing out the futility and incoherence of his tenets; by showing the latitude which they opposed to the worst of men, and the mortifying confessions which, if well grounded, they must have wrung from the best, I might set before you, did the time allow. the consequences of every hypothesis that debases practical religion. To avow those consequences must indeed imply a radical perversion of the understanding, and a depravity of heart so monstrous and unnatural as neither to be paralleled nor dreaded from the excess of its turpitude; but to overlook them, argues a degree of dullness or inaccuracy, which can scarcely be forgiven in men who not only engage in the contest without provocation, but lay claim to the honour of victory. To deny without disproving them, were matchless effrontery; and to stifle without disbelieving them, the most flagitious

insincerity. The gross improbability of the system commonly received is, I know, too apt to escape observation, either from the distance to which its effects are industriously thrown from the reach of impartial enquiry, or the specious colours in which they are exhibited, in order to attract wonder and amuse superstition. Hence the disregard some men have conceived, and even ventured to express, for morality, is veiled by the title of humility; the venomous and illiberal invectives heaped upon its defenders are consecrated by the name of zeal. A spirit of fearlessness, or rather of exultation, under the consciousness of practices which, however the precepts of Christ may have forbidden them, his blood will doubtless wipe away,—such a spirit is called the perfection of faith; the most wonderful instance of its efficacy, and the most striking proof of its utility. By these wretched artifices the credulous are deluded, the profligate consoled, and every man is taught to expect the blessings of Heaven, under a restriction not to over-value right actions, and with a tacit permission to repeat such as are wrong.

Faith, we are told, will atone for our real infirmities; but, as for our imaginary excellencies, they make us blind to the evidences of faith, insensible of its raptures, and unworthy of its rewards.

To the choice of my present subject, I was led by a sense of its uncommon importance, and a dread of the baleful influence which the misconception of it must have on our integrity and our peace. In un-

folding to you my own sentiments, I have made it my aim not to traduce persons, but to explain things —not to inflame your passions, but to convince your judgments — to rescue the misguided from error — to rouse the thoughtless into vigilance, and deter the presumptuous from false security. Were the speculative doctrines of enthusiasm brought to the standard of Christianity — were we to judge of them by the airy refinements and incoherent jargon of the enthusiast, we might be induced to think him not less mistaken about the properties of belief than the merits of obedience. The same objects which, viewed in the true and steady light of Revelation, at once exercise amazement and impress conviction, are distorted from their just proportions, and swollen to an artificial bulk, in the systems of the fanatic; — as if the Deity had endowed us with faculties which it is unlawful to employ, he makes a boast of assenting to doctrines which shock common sense, clash with all the dictates of intuition, and confound all the principles of demonstration. But with the reasonable Christian examination precedes assent; the accuracy of that examination is always suited to the importance of the subject; and the degree of that assent to the probability of the evidence. He never calls hypocrisy to the support of ignorance, nor pretends to believe propositions which he has in vain attempted to fathom. He neither denies with the sceptic what in itself is not entirely comprehended, nor adopts with the visionary what is indistinctly conceived, or totally unknown. He

nicely observes the imperfections and the capacities of the human mind. He distinguishes things which surpass from those which contradict reason. He marks the exact points where probability warrants belief, and certainty interdicts it; and where the primary, fundamental, and inflexible rules of human knowledge authorise dissent. But the faith of the enthusiast—that faith, for which he is content to despise morality, and on which he builds a right to salvation, too often consists in repeating what is not understood, or acknowledging what he does not endeavour to understand.

In the careless undistinguishing admission of every doctrine which Christianity has been tortured to defend, no man can find his account, unless he be too lazy to examine scripture proofs, or too stupid to comprehend them. But implicit belief, whether it arise from incapacity or idleness, makes no part of religion. It exposes men to delusion upon topics, where it is their duty and their interest to obtain the most faithful and precise information. It disgraces Christianity, by infusing suspicions that the Scriptures cannot endure the test of impartial scrutiny; and it seduces Christians to affront a God of infinite wisdom by offering to him the sacrifice of fools. Good works are the legitimate offspring of a rational belief; but an irrational beginning in credulity is not likely to terminate in virtue. The enthusiast indeed expects to propitiate the Almighty by the neglect rather than the exertion of his talents —by the ardour of admiration, rather than the firm-

ness of obedience — by gloomy meditations amidst the obscurities of mystery, rather than serious attention to the clearest and most interesting truths. Equally destitute and ignorant of the faith that passes from the understanding to the heart, he undervalues or denies such effects of it in others, as he has never experienced within himself.

In refuting the opinions of others, I have been obliged sometimes to reprove the obstinacy and uncharitableness that are interwoven with them; but surely, it is not the duty of a Christian teacher to harden obstinacy, to countenance uncharitableness, to dissemble consequences, because they exist — to spare the greater crime, while he reproves the less — or, on the contrary, to abstain from the confutation of groundless notions, because they have been productive of criminal actions. Such prudence is folly — such lenity the very excess of cruelty.

That the patrons of faith assume a most offensive superiority over those who hold works essential to salvation, is an incontestable fact; but the steadiness of defence should be proportionate to the impetuosity of assault; and, doubtless, the cause of Christianity, maintained on the firm and manly principles of Protestantism, is not to be complimented away. The reputation of those who have defended it by their writings, and adorned it by their lives, should not tamely be surrendered to the disposal of every dogmatical opinionatist, every stubborn bigot, or every audacious reviler.

With men who are more desirous to accuse than able to correct, it is not unusual to unite duplicity with malevolence — to hurl the fire-brands of sedition without any professed aim — and to scatter undistinguishing allegations, which they explain away, when drawn close by ill-nature, or even by good sense, to the case of particulars. These arts, however the persons who condescend to employ them may triumph in their own prudence, suggest no favourable opinion of their fortitude or their justice. If some men do not teach the word of Christ as it becomes them to do, let them be singled out for opposition, their arguments invalidated. their mistakes corrected, and their misrepresentations, if such they be, exposed; but the merits of the many ought not to be confounded with the faults of the few, nor should the suspicions which justly fall upon imposture be so far extended as to counteract truth. They who allow the reasonableness of these demands, yet elude their force by moulding their complaints into a different form. The truth, say they, is almost inevitably stifled by the oppression of error, and therefore one of our cautions is needless. The other is absolutely impertinent; for it is the many whom we deliberately blame, while our commendations are reserved for the few — the very few, who in this age of philosophic refinement on the one hand, or of ignorant supineness on the other, dare to inculcate evangelical doctrines, in evangelical language, and upon evangelical principles.

Here then the mask drops off, and this terrible

accusation meets us in the face; — by denying the all-sufficiency of faith, and contending for the necessity of works, you are traitors to your flocks, and apostates from your Saviour.

My brethren, the matter is now grown too serious to be hastily dismissed. In these unhappy days, when men dare to disobey their God even on system, and licentiousness of opinion keeps pace with profligacy of manners, the peace of the community must be nearly connected with the credit of your spiritual teachers. Incapacity, carelessness, prevarication, are no light charges against men who are established under the protection of the laws, blessed with all the advantages of a liberal education, and appointed to the momentous office of instructing the unenlightened, and reclaiming the abandoned. But to what do they amount? That we do not discharge this office — that we have not reaped those advantages — that we merit not that protection — that we are incompetent and deceitful guides — that we neither tread in the path of salvation nor wish to find it — and voluntarily betray the Revelation which we have solemnly pledged ourselves to support.

Instead of retorting these invectives, be it our business to show the candid, the judicious, and dispassionate part of mankind, that they are unjust. If ignorance be objected to us, let us disarm the objection, by insisting on such doctrines as possess at once the perspicuity of reason, and the authority of Revelation. If carelessness be alleged against us, let the allegation fall on a quarter from which it

must recoil on the head of its defenceless authors — on our unwearied endeavours to sift every theological question severely — to strip it of foreign and unbecoming arguments — to detect sophisms, however subtle — to deduce inferences, however unexpected and unwelcome — to drag into light the lurking mischiefs of error, when it demands unlimited confidence, under the imposing form of scriptural simplicity — and to separate the dross of human inventions from the pure and genuine word of God.

He that draws the boundaries between faith and works, if he be not entitled to the gratitude, should be sheltered at least from the resentments, of all parties. The practical Christian will not be displeased at a train of reasoning, which demonstrates the stability of his hopes, and the rectitude of his habits. On the other hand, for those who despise morality to be offended at any seeming intimation of their defects in it, would not be altogether consistent. If it be quite immeritorious, as they tell us it is, why should the want of it be deemed by them at least as a reproach; or to what end should they be anxious for it, as a recommendation before men, while they are conscious of its extreme vileness in the sight of God? On the contrary, if it possess any share of merit, what reason have they to resent expostulations, by which themselves may be extricated from the ignorance of delusion, and the misery of guilt? But error is seldom of a piece. Whatsoever person, from the most upright intentions, and in the most proper manner, undertakes

the reformation of the enthusiast, must bid defiance to unkind suspicions, to peevish cavils, and acrimonious slander. Prejudice is a stubborn weed, which yields only to perseverance; but as for that impatience of advice, that detestation of the adviser, which characterise the prejudiced, they constitute an experimental proof for the actual existence of those evils, the prospect of which must have alarmed every sensible enquirer into the opinions whence they spring. They increase at once the difficulties of instruction, and the obligation for every honest man to encounter those difficulties. They are a melancholy indication that the disorder (we apprehend) has risen to a crisis, where lenitives must lose their use, and where to delay the application of efficacious medicines, because they are distasteful, would be inhumanity complicated with breach of trust.

The spurious faith some men would obtrude upon us banishes morality from the sphere of Christian redemption, and, of course, opens a door to the most shameless and incorrigible wickedness. Let me now expostulate with those who have not advanced to this extravagance of absurdity; who allow reason some share in explaining the Gospel, and have not cast off all regard for practical religion. If you have searched the Scriptures, not to justify what you have done, but to discover what you ought to do, you must perceive what is repeatedly and positively asserted in them — the dignity of righteousness, and the meanness of sin. But what appearance of pro-

priety do you preserve, or what proof do you give of sincerity, when the good which you commend, that you do not; and the evil which you condemn, that you do? Should any one applaud the justice and utility of human institutions, and plead this applause in vindication of transgressing, or even instead of observing them, such a plea might expose him to ridicule, but could not screen him from punishment. As preposterously does that man act, who contents himself with confessing Christ, though he does not overcome the world — who admits the right of Almighty God to enforce obedience, in the moment he has determined to disobey — and who arrogates to himself the privileges of a child, while he spurns from him the authority of the Father by whom they are conferred.

God, it must be owned, is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; his approbation must centre in qualities which are most similar to his own perfections; and his laws, it might be presumed, would open the widest sphere to those qualities. But if the Gospel be designed, not in fact to regulate our actions, but to draw from us confessions of its tendency to regulate them well, the most excellent rule of righteousness must become ultimately an incitement to the most daring iniquity. Had Christ's promises been annexed to faith disjoined from repentance — had they been indiscriminately lavished upon the good and bad — had no admonitions been given to the one, and no threats denounced against the other — had it been obscurely hinted to us, that

essentially different as are the natures of virtue and vice, the practice of either is to us indifferent,—our expectations of future felicity would not have been unreasonable. But the general import of the Scriptures, and the frequent declarations of our blessed Master, give no countenance to such hopes. He has proposed everlasting recompense, not to the outward show of faith, but inward uprightness of intention—not to those who say Lord, Lord, but such as do the will of their Father which is in heaven. Upon the same conditions, expressed in the same words, Christ has admitted us to the dear and honourable relation of brethren, sisters, and mothers. He has dignified with the appellation of his friends those who keep his commands. He has pronounced the most solemn benediction on the meek, the merciful, the poor in spirit, the pure in heart. Every act of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, he will accept and repay as an act of regard towards himself.

In like manner, when St. Paul recommends faith, he neither plucks it asunder from hope, nor sets it on a level with charity. When he describes the whole armour of God, he joins the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit to the shield of faith. When he bids us put on the Lord Jesus, he forbids us to make provision for the lusts of the flesh. When he exhorts us to prove what is that perfect, acceptable will of God, the most unequivocal, illustrious proof consists in our non-conformity to this world, and our transformation to the pursuits of a better.

Let not the advocates for morality be any longer charged with depreciating scriptural evidence, or despising scriptural expression. If those Scriptures are to be judged by the same laws of criticism which prevail in other compositions — if they be addressed to our faculties in their present constitution — if they be intended to inform rather than to guide — to resolve doubts rather than excite them, I may now demand the assent of every unprejudiced man to this declaration, that, in the foregoing passage, the necessity of works is inculcated, their merit ascertained, and their reward proposed. Yet you may insist that exterior virtues are often ungenerous in their aim, and imperfect in their performance — that we practise them under the mechanical impulse of constitution, or the sudden sallies of caprice — that we look forwards to temporal praise, or temporal profit.

So far as any of these circumstances enter into our action, they debase its worth, and lessen its retribution. But while I allow the reality of the fact, and the fairness of the conclusion deduced from it, I must consider the introduction of both as altogether impertinent or insidious. The question before us turns upon the merit of works performed in compliance with Christ's injunctions, and in expectation of God's favour. Such works, I insist upon it, have a real, a proper, though a relative perfection. They are all that we can accomplish, and therefore all that God will exact. They include the terms upon which God has offered to us salvation, and necessarily

establish our claim to it. Much of the darkness and uncertainty that have gathered round the subject of final acceptance, may be dispelled by distinctions so intelligible that the meanest capacity may grasp them — so determinate that even the strongest cannot break their force — and at the same time so obvious, that no man could account for their being overlooked, did he not remember that the arts of controversy puzzle the most important truth, and the pride of controversy disdains such as are most plain. When the Deity assigns rewards or punishments to actions, we may conclude, from his attributes of equity and holiness, that such actions are respectively fit subjects for such appointments.

To what extent vice would be punished, or virtue rewarded, independently of a revealed law, were a question which on the grounds of natural religion it is impossible to settle, and which it is as absurd to discuss within the pale of the Gospel. Christianity, we know, has enlarged the scope of our moral agency, and enforced its sanctions. The same Christianity also assures us, that the wicked shall be eternally miserable, and the righteous eternally happy. If mercy had not come to the aid of justice, our sense of human imperfection informs us, that the rewards had been less glorious; our conviction of the Divine goodness may convince us, that if justice had not excluded mercy, the punishment would have been less severe. Faith certainly did not obtain this dispensation in our favour; because the existence of every object must precede our

assent, that it exists. It will not, by its own unaided efficacy, procure for us the advantages of that dispensation, since they are by express condition reserved for righteousness. Among Christians, therefore, the consideration of moral desert becomes complex; it includes the inherent merit of works antecedently to any covenant, and an extrinsic merit superinduced upon them by virtue of a particular covenant, under which indeed the works themselves are produced by purer motives, and performed with greater exactness. They are the works, not of men absolutely, but of men under the specific character of Christians. They are the works not of frail and corrupt creatures only, but of creatures acting under a religious economy where frailty is to be assisted and corruption rectified.

This method of decision steers happily between the arrogance of popery and the gloominess of Calvinism. It stands discharged from the heavy incumbrances of imputed righteousness, which, as an expression applied to Christ, is not warranted by Scripture, and, as a proposition applicable to any mediator, can scarcely be reconciled to reason. It is calculated at once to excite our gratitude and animate our obedience. It unites hope with humility — sincerity of belief with integrity of behaviour.

I think it beside the purpose of this discourse to enter into the dark and thorny subject of justification, into the different meanings in which the word is used, the different terms on which the thing itself is accomplished, and the different methods in which it is beneficial. But, for the honour of the English

church, and to the confusion of those who boast themselves as its warmest advocates, I must not conceal from you, that this Church has affirmed good works to be the fruits of faith — to spring necessarily from a true and lively faith — to be acceptable to God and Christ. I hold, according to the open declaration of that church, that they do not of themselves expiate sins; for that expiation is effected by the mercy of God, announced to us by Jesus Christ. I hold, by fair consequences from the doctrines of the same, that they promote expiation, not positively, but indirectly — not as efficient, but conditional causes; or, in more popular language, that unless works are performed, forgiveness will not be granted.

St. John speaks of faith as the instrument of the conquest over the world — as the spring which sets in motion our efforts to be virtuous — which quickens their vigour and directs their aim. In this position the Apostle has not done what his interpreters are prone to do; he has neither perplexed what is distinct, nor united what is irrelative. Faith, exercised on the evidences and laws of revealed religion, sets before you the beauty of holiness, the deformity of sin, the charms of God's mercy, and the terrors of his wrath. It lays open to us the excellence of heavenly joys, which we ought to pursue; the hollowness of earthly gratifications, which we ought to abandon; the severity of hell torments, which we ought to shun. It represents to you the various offices of Christ, and the relations severally result-

ing from them. If he be our teacher, we should be careful to follow his instructions. If he be our redeemer, we should be anxious not to forfeit our portion in the blessings of redemption. If he be our judge, we should be indefatigable to secure his approbation.

A Gospel thus circumstanced must be calculated to influence every part of our conduct — to convince the understanding, to engage the affections, and to regulate the will; but if that Gospel be reduced to a matter of private speculation, or public profession — if it only interests curiosity, soothes melancholy, or flatters pride, our assent to it may not be insincere — it cannot be meritorious; it must, in some measure, be criminal. You will object, perhaps, "Is it possible for merit and guilt to inhere in the same subject? or, is it proper for the sacred writers to condemn in one place what in another they extol?" I answer, no; but it is neither impossible nor improper for them to speak differently of an act marked by some fixed, well-known appellation, as that act be complicated with different circumstances, or applied to different ends. It is the distinctive property of a Christian faith to produce that assemblage of moral and religious qualifications which, in the emphatical and comprehensive style of Scripture, is called righteousness. Where these qualifications unite in one character, we shall discern a propriety in all the magnificent and accumulated commendations bestowed upon faith.

Here then let us attempt a short, but, I hope, an

exact and satisfactory solution of the dispute so long agitated about the comparative value of faith and works. Faith, considered separately from works, is certainly inferior to them, because our wills, as I before observed to you, in the first case are passive, and in the next endowed with activity; and hence arises the distinction between intellectual and moral approbation — intellectual approbation always excluding choice, and moral always supposing it. But faith, considered in reference to works, and in conjunction with them, steps forward to the more honourable station; since, by a rule which pervades all existences in all modes, the cause must be prior to the effect, generally in order of time, and invariably in order of dignity. Works without faith may have some little merit; but faith without works can have none. Works are exceedingly improved by faith, and faith is quite perfected by works. In this elevated point of view St. John speaks of faith in the words of my text, and in other parts of the Epistle whence it is taken. In chap. iii. 3. he mentions a good life as the genuine produce of a Christian belief; because every man that has hopes of seeing Christ (where hope presupposes faith) purifies himself even as he is pure. He insists upon it as the surest criterion of the Christian character; because whatever is born of God doth not commit sin. To guard against the misconstructions of those who usurp the honour of regeneration, and then exclude sin from works, which in the unregenerate are confessedly sinful,

he tells us, that by the observance or neglect of righteousness the children of God and of the Devil are made manifest. Our Saviour has thus made some parts of our behaviour the sure signs of the principle from which the whole proceeds — "by their fruits you shall know them."

From these and other expressions, carefully weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, it appears that St. John speaks not of that faith which is confined to a bare acknowledgment of Christ's mission, or abstruse researches into his doctrines. An effect so important as that of overcoming the world, calls upon us to trace out some higher cause; it leads us to that vital principle of religion, which gives proof of its energy in the performance of actions intrinsically excellent — in the government of all vicious appetites — in forbearance from all unlawful enjoyments — and in a total subjection of ourselves and our concerns to the will of God. It was by this full strict correspondence between their words and their deeds that St. John's followers distinguished themselves, and on this alone they grounded their pretensions to the prerogatives of the Gospel. But had they persisted in those practices which the corruptions of Pagan morality had introduced, and the imperfections of Pagan philosophy did not disallow, these pretensions could not have been urged with any shadow of justice; they would only have convicted these deluded wretches of folly in the erroneous notions they had formed about a right to acceptance—of inconsistence in pretending to stand

forth for the honour of Christ's religion, while they frustrated every purpose for which he established it — of perverseness, because they were addicted to every pursuit that he had prohibited — and of ingratitude, because they eventually rejected every blessing that he had offered.

Let us bring home the Evangelist's precept to ourselves. Survey the conduct of those who name the name of Christ without overcoming the world, and then judge at what distance they stand from the duties, and therefore from the rewards, of his Gospel. Some men amass riches or pant after the distinctions of power. Others give up their innocence and their tranquillity, a prey to the canker of discontent, and incur the guilt of loving the world without obtaining the satisfaction of enjoying it. The attention of many is either dissipated in a giddy circle of trifling amusements, or strained in the pursuit of attainments where solid use is exchanged for splendid display, or unstrung, as it were, in a state of lazy, languid listlessness, equally irksome to themselves, and unprofitable to others. Yet more consume their lives amidst the riots of intemperance, the intrigues of seduction, and the outrages of debauchery, and heap crime upon crime, without remorse for the past, and without preparation for the future. This wild harvest of follies and vices is to be found among those who profess at least to believe the Gospel, and who, when the prospect of another life breaks in on their worldly dreams, form I know not how crude and hasty

hopes of deriving I know not what advantages from the interposition of a Redeemer. But will it be said, that this Redeemer has given any sanctions to their practices, or holds out any glimmerings of comfort, unless to those whom faith has led into the first dawnings of repentance, and repentance afterwards conducted to the meridian light of Christian hope? If you reply in the negative, it is the height of madness to appropriate the favour of God, while you continue to violate his commands. Will it be said, that men who make duty bend to inclination have true love for their Saviour, or reverence for their Creator? Can their interests be fixed in Heaven, while their affections are weighed down by the clogs of earthly pleasures? or have they, in any degree, attained that purity of thought, and that holiness of life, without which no man shall see the Lord? The weakness of honouring religion by our mouths, while we disgrace it by our actions — the wickedness of claiming God's approbation without endeavouring to deserve it, are clearly shown in the reproofs that our blessed Saviour pointed against the hypocrisy and the pride of the Jews. This people boasted themselves the descendants of Abraham and the favourites of Jehovah; but their boasts were arrogant and vain, so long as they imitated not the patriarch's righteousness, and set at nought the commands of their God. They could not in strict propriety be said to know the master, whom they did not obey; or, at least, their knowledge of his will served only to aggravate the crime

of transgressing it, and added insolence to impiety — perfidy to rebellion.

For the same reason, we Christians stand inexcusable in confessing the excellence of a law that we obstinately violate. We voluntarily earn the wages of unrighteousness, while we claim the privileges of virtue. We are enslaved by the shackles of worldly temptations when surrounded by every expedient that should make us free; and though eternal glory be the prize set before us, instead of exerting our resolute and reiterated efforts to obtain it, we utter a few idle professions, — we form a few unauthorised hopes, which answer no end but that of exposing our absurdity and our inconsistence — the deceit we put upon ourselves, and the horrid indignity we offer to our Judge. Do not imagine this description exaggerated. If the recollection of your own sins makes you afraid to think it true — if the secret corruptions of your heart would persuade you to think it false, reflect, I beseech you, reflect, before it is too late, on the only plea which such an offender can support on the last day.

Thus will he speak — I acknowledge that the blessed Jesus designed to further the salvation of mankind, and that his Gospel is admirably framed to effect it, by reforming their lives, if such reformation be necessary; but as the way that his moral precepts opened to happiness was tedious and painful, I struck aside into another path, whither my passions guided me, and my pleasures followed me. He commanded me, no doubt, to abstain from

sensual gratifications, but I have wallowed in them — to renounce wealth, but I have grasped at it — to despise power, but I have thirsted for it. Yet I called myself a son of God, and of course am entitled to all the privileges of that relation, even though I have fulfilled none of its conditions. I ever took my rank under the banners of Christ, though I have not sacrificed one interest or subdued one lust in his service. I have extolled without obeying his laws. I have admired without imitating his example. But for what purpose should I have engaged in these laborious works? I had risen to the towering heights of faith — of a faith unshaken and most unlimited. In consequence of that faith, I, who have willingly been a captive to the world, challenge a reward not less distinguished than falls to the share of other men, who have overcome it at the loss of all that is dear to flesh and blood.

My brethren, let your own consciences determine how far such pretensions can avail before the just and awful tribunal of Jesus Christ.

FAITH AND MORALITY

[CONCLUDED].

1 JOHN, v. 4.

Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.

IN a discourse lately delivered before you on these words, I endeavoured to show the insufficiency of a partial obedience to make us the sons of God. The present will be employed in exposing the folly and inutility of belief merely professional. By a familiar mode of writing, which strengthens his language without entangling his ideas, the Evangelist, you may observe, has linked together the instrument with the effect — the exercise of faith with the conquest of the world. Hence the import of my text has been strangely misrepresented by those who prefer the glimmering of mysticism to the solidity and plainness of truth — by those who consult the Scriptures not to rectify, but to defend their favourite tenets — by those who one moment tear asunder belief from practice, and the next crowd them together confusedly, and who imagine that the defects of the one will be amply supplied by the abundance of the other. Such men are told that to

overcome the world requires faith, and then dream that faith necessarily, and by implication, overcomes the world; but they argue that a genuine faith includes a virtuous life, and frequently act as if their own faith would be accepted in the stead of it.

Could they who dogmatise on sacred subjects peremptorily be persuaded to examine them carefully, we might soon bring to an issue those unhappy disputes about the doctrines of Christianity, which, though started perhaps with honest intentions, have yet been carried on with a most unchristian temper. As no party, however, would be shameless enough to decline openly the equitable condition, it may be prudent to draw some lines of distinction before we proceed. By examination, then, I do not mean the rapid effusion of scriptural phrases, which it is far easier to accumulate than to connect — which those who display them most ostentatiously do not always explain them most intelligibly — and in the repetition of which it is possible for the understanding to slumber, while the memory is exercised, and the fancy captivated. But in the investigation of doctrines on which eternity is suspended, it is necessary to trace every word through its significations, whether primary or subordinate, common or appropriate — to analyse every sentence into its component parts — to mark the connection of those parts to each other, and the relation of the whole to preceding or subsequent passages — to account for local and temporary circumstances — to bear in mind on what occasion any

doctrine is introduced, and to what persons it is addressed; to determine ambiguous texts by such as are more definite, the obscure by such as are plain; to support general doctrines by particular proofs, not with the licentiousness of arbitrary assumption, but the calmness and precision of elaborate induction; not to be staggered by accidental difficulties, the solution of which progressive knowledge or persevering industry may supply; never to be seduced by indirect or partial expressions into a desertion of those leading, indisputable truths on which Revelation is known to hinge. To accomplish this labour demands some accuracy of judgment, and some extent of erudition; but, without erudition and judgment, who shall presume to usurp a right of decision on controverted points? Or what excuse shall be alleged for the precipitancy and uncharitableness of those who want these qualifications, when others, who possess them eminently, still think themselves obliged to enquire with caution, to determine with humility, and dissent with candour?

In a debate about faith and works, it is by no means superfluous to preserve you against the artifices of persons, who endeavour to overwhelm all rational theology in a chaos of impertinent, indigested, discordant quotations, countless indeed in number as the sands on the shore, and, like them too, lumpish in the mass, and light after separation. Of a different and more genuine stamp are the scriptural tenets of such teachers as hold it pro-

faneness to apply the word of God rashly, and weakness or hypocrisy to search it superficially. They know that neither the examples of the best writers, nor the severest rules of criticism, forbid a more relaxed and more confined use of the same word; and that in the application of these rules few difficulties arise to stagger any enquirer, whose mind is not warped by prepossession, nor darkened by superstition. Faith bears sometimes a simple, and sometimes a complex signification: it denotes assent to abstract propositions, and a scheme of conduct correspondent to such assent. In the former case our wills are generally passive, and the utmost merit that we can assume is of a kind altogether negative. In the latter our best powers are exerted for the best purposes; inclination follows the dictates of conscience, while conscience is guided by wisdom that cannot err. All faith may be resolved into a dependence on the veracity and goodness of the Supreme Being; yet the uniformity of its nature by no means excludes a diversity in its operations. They relate to the past and to the future — to the history of Christ's life and mission, or the revelation of God's will and promises. Faith therefore, according to the difference of its subjects, operates by anticipation or reflection, and on every subject immediately or remotely leads to practice. It inspires us with gratitude by the representation of what Christ has done and suffered. with hope from the prospect of the recompense that

he has offered, and with alacrity in performing the commands he has imposed.

That such are the properties of scriptural faith might easily be demonstrated, either by an extensive search into the great scope of the whole Christian dispensation, or an exact comparison of its various yet connected parts. The Gospel, I will be bold to say, ascribes merit to faith considered not absolutely, but relatively — not in its capacities, but its energies — not as a single independent act, but a principle which pervades a series of many actions — not as a principle constituent, but casual — not as a cause mechanically, but morally efficient; in short, not only as convincing the judgment, but sanctifying the heart. Formed upon this model, our belief, instead of being detached from our moral habits, becomes united to them — so united, indeed, as to evince their sincerity, promote their efficacy, and secure their continuance. Possessed of these qualifications, it borrows no aid from affected humility, or from real credulity — it enjoins no artifices of self-deceit, no force to reason, no abject, cowardly resignation of those intellectual powers, without which the light of the Gospel must be to us as darkness, its evidences unascertained, its precepts unknown, its advantages unattainable. It demands no sacrifice but that of our prejudices and our lusts. It acts upon us as beings who judge, who feel, and who determine; and it directs each of these faculties to their proper end. In a word, it begins in sound sense, and terminates in right behaviour. Of

faith thus advanced to its just perfection — of regeneration not instantaneously accomplished by some unintelligible magic charm, but gradually proceeding from improvement in our minds to amendment in our lives, the sacred writers have spoken in a language too solemn to be trifled with, too decisive to be explained away. We are furnished to good works; we are the workmanship of God created in Jesus Christ to good works; and by good works is faith made perfect.

To rescue St. John's words from the perverse sense to which they have been wrested, is the design of these general remarks. They have also a farther use, and, without impropriety, usher in a more direct and formal confutation of their mistakes, who would exempt themselves from the ignominy of sin, or rather who lay claim to the highest rewards of righteousness, only because they acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the world. With these mistakes it is the duty of every Christian teacher to grapple, because they cherish pharisaical pride, and pharisaical malignity — blunt the edge of every social feeling — extinguish whatever deserves the name of a Christian spirit — and contract the favours of an infinitely wise God to the narrow circle of one misguided, conceited, headstrong party. But in the soil where these rank weeds shoot up with wild luxuriance, we may discern a total barrenness of all the fruits which the seeds of Christianity, taking root in an honest and good heart, are accustomed to produce — a devotion

warm, yet rational; a generous and enlarged philanthropy; temperance without austerity; faith without credulity; and hope without presumption.

For those who avowedly undervalue practice to be offended at any impeachment of their own defects in it, is highly unbecoming. If it be utterly insignificant, as they tell us it is, why should the want of it be looked upon as a reproach, or why should they be anxious for it as a recommendation to men, while they are conscious of its vileness in the sight of God? On the other hand, if it be in any degree meritorious, what reason have they to despise or resent those expostulations, which are designed to rescue them from the pain and disgrace of guilt? But error is never of a piece. Whoever, from the purest motives, and in the most candid manner, undertakes the reformation of enthusiasts, must bid defiance to uncharitable suspicions, to peevish cavils, and acrimonious invectives. This impatience of advice joined to the hatred of those who advise, constitute an experimental proof for the actual existence of those evils, the antecedent probability of which may be established by abstract reasoning. They increase at once the difficulties of instruction, and the obligation for every faithful instructor to encounter them. They are melancholy indications that the disorder we lament has been inflamed to a height where lenitives must lose their force; and to delay the application of efficacious medicines because they are distasteful, were inhumanity complicated with breach of trust.

Many apologies have, no doubt, been urged in extenuation of the odium which religious errors, when pursued through all the labyrinths of studied or ignorant misrepresentation to their probable consequences, must incur. It has been often urged, that they who exalt faith do not invariably neglect practice—that in points of morality some of them stand on a level at least with those by whom they are traduced—that their regularity is exemplary, and their benevolence diffusive. The reality of such exceptions I will not dispute; wherever they are to be found, my hearty respect shall attend them, and most sincerely would I congratulate every accession to their number. Yet, on an impartial, attentive scrutiny, I am obliged to look upon them as triumphs of nature over prejudice—as invincible arguments for the inefficiency and unsoundness of those sentiments with which they are unfortunately associated—as honourable instances of self-contradiction, where consistence would imply a total depravation of heart as well as understanding. Of the checks which feeling gives to the rash sallies of fancy—to the haughty stubbornness of arrogant or systematic obstinacy, the history of mankind furnishes many proofs. The patrons of an admired sect maintained the equality of crimes; and amongst the advocates for a modern religion it is an established maxim, that heresy cancels all obligations to justice and humanity, supersedes all rights, whether natural or civil, and that we do service both to God and Christ, by the undistin-

guishing extirpation of those whom God has created and Christ redeemed. Yet we never hear that the Stoic inflicted punishment with equal severity on the parricide and the thief; and, in our own times, many who would strain every nerve to oppose the advancement of Protestantism, shudder at the thought of staining their hands with Protestant blood. The plain fact is this: God, to whom all our infirmities lie open, has graciously implanted in us many secret instincts, which counteract the impetuosity of passion, and the blindness of error, and alleviate the mischiefs they cannot prevent. Hence the attractions of virtue operate upon us imperceptibly. We are sometimes snatched from guilt without perceiving the means of our escape, and sometimes our sensibilities shrink from the commission of those deeds which, seen at a distance, lose their deformity, or viewed perhaps through the false mediums of prepossession, assume an appearance even of merit. Be it remembered, however, that such virtue, instead of resting on the broad foundation of principle, derives only a precarious, occasional support from feeling—that its influence therefore must be scanty and accidental—and that even for this influence we are indebted to restraints to which we yield reluctantly, and from which it is our constant, though happily ineffectual, labour to break away.

The generality of Christians have hitherto rested with entire satisfaction on the rectitude of all determinations which are warranted by the moral sense,

when under the guidance of reason and Revelation. The least violation of this faculty, in compliance with all or any of the other mental powers, is the source of self-condemnation. The greatest violation of those powers in obedience to this faculty has been attended with proportionate comfort. Such have been the reasonings of men justly eminent for their knowledge and piety; but enthusiasts, in the excess of their infatuation, have thrown down all distinctions—they cast away the gaudy trappings of works, as sullying the purity of faith—they measure their progress in imaginary religion by their defects in real morality—and, in contempt of St. Paul's prohibition, rush upon sin that grace may abound.

You will not, I hope, think my time mis-spent in laying bare the wickedness of apologies, on which so much stress is frequently laid. Habits of thinking more or less produce in the end correspondent habits of acting. Where error predominates, the judgment must often misguide the will; and the same zeal, the same sincerity, which do honour to a good cause, serve but to perpetuate and to multiply the mischiefs of a bad one. In estimating, therefore, the danger of any opinions, we should attend to their obvious tendency. The conviction which is built upon such proof is not to be shaken by the intervention of collateral, adventitious causes. If this rule be just, we may securely pronounce all such doctrines contradictory to Scripture as depreciate the dignity of morality, cast a damp upon our

admiration of its intrinsic worth, and spread a languor of feebleness on our endeavours to observe it. To fix boundaries to the extravagances of enthusiasm is indeed impracticable. Examples are not wanting, where virtue has not only been stripped of its honours, but branded with infamy; where indifference has led the way to deliberate, invincible aversion; and where every attempt to become perfect as our Heavenly Father, has been misconstrued into a glaring proof of imperfection — into an act of folly combined with impiety. This, no doubt, is the last and most dreadful state of delusion; and the bare mention of it is sufficient to chill every honest mind with horror. But, in pointing out the fatal effect of the notions I am now combating, it is unnecessary to suppose them carried to such shocking extremes. If they do not actually excite an abhorrence of right, they tend at least to encourage the practice of wrong, to inflame the imagination with phantoms of self-importance, and to lull the conscience by the enchanting promise of security to the most abandoned of mankind. Should the boldness of this declaration startle you, recollect that it is not I who fasten these alarming effects upon error, but that the effects themselves cleave to it almost inseparably.

According to the usual method of stating the account between faith and works, no man of corrupt disposition can hesitate in his choice. Selfishness would for once side with religion, and fix the preference to that task which involves the fewest diffi-

culties, and at the same time proposes the amplest rewards. If there be no merit in the performance of these works, which by the supposition are improperly styled good, the transition is neither long nor rugged to this inference, that in the omission of them is no demerit. To what purpose then does the Christian struggle with appetite, or abstain from gratification? Regeneration has exalted him above the defilements of iniquity: it separates lewdness from his pleasure, and cruelty from his revenge; it leaves him at large to wanton in the luxuries of wealth, and the pageantry of power; it reconciles seeming contradictions, accomplishes what the vain defenders of morality have declared to be impossibilities, and makes the conquest of the world not incompatible with the most unlimited enjoyment of all that the world can afford.

Where deductions of this kind may be fairly charged upon any hypothesis, avowed libertines, who have no reverence for virtue, no hopes of salvation, must naturally wish the premises to be true. But that any reasonable creature should seriously think them so, is wonderful: it is wonderful that advocates for them should be found among those who acknowledge the authenticity of the Gospel—who pretend to an uncommon zeal for its honour, and set up as it were an exclusive right to the knowledge of its doctrines. Could they, however, for once stoop to employ that reason, which those who possess it most scantily are apt most industriously to vilify, we might challenge them to try its strength

on the following positions. Whatever perplexities may have arisen about the essence of obligation,—whether it be derived from the means of acting, or the ends for which we act; whether it depend upon the final acquisition of happiness, or be involved in the frame and texture of those actions to which happiness is annexed,—all parties seem agreed in one point, that right and obligation are coincident. But if morality neither imply desert nor confer happiness, it is deprived of every quality that enters into our ideas of obligation—it is neither a part nor an adjunct, and of course contains no portion of its energy. Again, were morality connected with Revelation, it must inevitably oblige, because Revelation is throughout dictated by one common wisdom, and enforced by one common authority; but our opponents insist that works are not the subjects in which religious duty enters. By my first position, therefore, they cannot oblige; and by my second, after being permitted to hold an inferior rank in the scheme of redemption, they must now be utterly excluded from the least relation to it. We have at last fixed on a criterion for detecting the fallacy of all the evasive, desultory, jarring, irreconcilable expedients to which those who dissent from us are reduced. In adjusting the value of works, there is room for few alternatives. They avail much in procuring the approbation of Almighty God, or they avail not at all. They may be neglected without any hazard, or must be observed with great advantage. They are quite superfluous, or quite in-

dispensable. In order to escape the infamy that must attend an avowed extirpation of morality, the patrons of faith have had recourse to concessions that prove too much, or prove nothing; to subterfuge, which an honourable cause disdains, by which a precarious one cannot be long supported, and from which nothing can be gathered, but that such as employ them have neither the ability to defend their system, nor the honesty to renounce it.

Works, we are told, may be in some measure praiseworthy, but we must not think ourselves authorised to hope for that praise from our own works. What then? Is the Almighty a respecter of persons; and does he neglect, when actually done, what he antecedently approves because fitting to be done? Is his love of virtue confined to its abstract existence amidst the eternal reasons of things; or is the contemplation of it, when produced into act, exercised only in the immensity of his own perfections? Among his creatures, is it an offence to the God of truth to consider things as they really are — to consider them as he has ordained them to be in his works — to consider them as he has declared them to be in his word? Is the desire of applause in itself a ground for condemnation? Is it impiety for them to fulfil the conditions of those favours which God has covenanted to bestow? Moral sentiments must presuppose a knowledge of good and evil; and why should the conscience of a right choice be excluded from pleasure, when the recollection of a wrong one is allowed to give pain? Faith itself, in

the opinion of its admirers, is most praiseworthy; and they are seldom found too diffident in the expectation of its recompense, or apprehensive that to appropriate such recompense is in fact to forfeit it. Others, again, tell us that morality conduces to our earthly welfare only; but enthusiasm is here unlucklily betrayed into an alliance with infidelity. Among the free-thinkers of ancient and modern times, it is a favourite maxim, that utility is the rule of right. To this visionary but comfortless and most pernicious doctrine, the internal constitution and the mutual relation of things, all the dictates of natural religion, and all the sanctions of revealed, have too often been opposed in vain. I will not, however, dissemble one circumstance which distinguishes the infidel from the enthusiast. The infidel maintains the temporal advantages of what he calls morality as an encouragement to individuals, and a security to the community, in the absence of a Providence and a future state. He is therefore only erroneous. The enthusiast, while he admits both a Providence and a future, yet adopts the same opinions about the rule of right into which the infidel is driven by the denial of both. He therefore is inconsistent as well as erroneous.

Let us search the fact itself. If felicity be here the product of virtue, analogy surely justifies us in looking forward to a similar dispensation hereafter. If the good things are to be added to those who seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, they are a pledge that nobler blessings are in store.

And hence the seeming irregularities of the moral world are accounted for; because a probationary state, so far from requiring, does not even admit, plenary and adequate retribution. Whether good men are happy on this side the grave or the other, our Saviour's promise implies reward; but the word *addition* seems to intimate that future happiness is the proper supreme reward of righteousness, and present happiness but the secondary and improper. As to the latter, the Deity may, for wise purposes, and often does, withhold it; but the very act of withholding it consequently establishes our right to the former, by bringing to the test our submission to the appointments of God, and our trust in his mercy. On the other hand, let us for a moment allow the enthusiast's assertion, that virtue, if it has any, only can have a temporal recompense, to be well grounded; and imagine to yourselves a Christian renouncing pleasure, wealth, and power, in order to preserve his integrity. What is the result? He has done a work by the omission of which something must have been gained, and by the performance of which he is cut off from all possibility of obtaining an equivalent, either now or in future. Faith, indeed, may secure him a reward; but that faith is neither diminished nor increased by a mistaken effort of duty on the side of morality. If the improbability of their assertion be thus palpable in an imaginary case, let us bring it to the standard of one that is real.

The Apostles will be saved, because they believed in Christ; but all which they performed or endured

in consequence of this belief — their unwearied industry, their unshaken fortitude, their renunciation of every advantage, and their defiance of every hardship, certainly did not meet with any recompense on earth, and as certainly will meet with none in heaven. If the recital of these deductions borders upon blasphemy, shall it be said that the opinions which lead to them are calculated to promote the honour of God's attributes, and the interests of Christ's religion? Whenever, and by whomsoever this be said, the assertion is groundless; and I am at a loss to determine whether it most deserves contempt or abhorrence.

After baffling the attempt of enthusiasts to puzzle the question; after showing that the degradation of morality paves the way for its total exclusion, I must again bring forward, what some men are extremely studious to keep out of sight — the effects of that exclusion, and the languid, distorted, ghastly form of religion, as they present it to our piety — shall I say? — or our indignation? As works are not necessary to a Christian, I shall not scruple to pronounce the faith for which they contend a cheap and lazy service, and reconcileable not only to the neglect of all that Christ seems to enjoin, but the perpetration of all that he seems to forbid. It is a victory, not indeed of the spirit over the flesh, but of imagination over reason. It is a yoke, not to our passions, but our understanding. It is a burthen most destructive of that glorious liberty, into which

the sons of God were redeemed from the tyranny of sin.

So intricate and illusory are the wanderings of the human mind, that opinions, which in their first movements diverged from truth in opposite directions, at their extremities often meet in one point. To the panegyrists of faith it may be a matter of surprise to hear, that in debasing works commonly denominated virtuous, they are not entitled to the praise of singularity. It may humble their pride to be informed that Hume, their fellow-labourer in the same task, is distinguished by zeal not less ardent than their own. They would do well to consider that their associate, after attempting to pluck down the whole fabric of Christianity, has proceeded to undermine and shake the very basis of natural religion itself. This hardy champion of atheism has, like the enthusiast, rudely driven out reason from its province of judging on the merit and demerit of works; he has pointed his severest raillery against divines, who, under the disguise of philosophers, treat morals as enforced by the sanctions of reward and punishment; and he boldly explodes every theory that is grounded in the difference between actions voluntary and involuntary. In pursuing this parallel I am not conscious of exaggerated or invidious representation; but if the application be just, the system I am opposing certainly revolts common sense, strikes at the root of good morals, sets Scripture at variance with Scripture, and swarms with tenets far more mysterious than all the facti-

tious mysteries which its patrons affect to adore. Will they persist in boasting that their theory exalts the Gospel? I deny the fact, and insist, that were that theory countenanced by the sacred writers in the degree that is pretended, instead of reconciling Deists to Christianity, it would compel all reasonable Christians to take refuge in Deism — I say to take refuge, because no man can embrace such a revelation without doing what his nature and his religion now forbid him to do — without calling sweet bitter, and bitter sweet — without turning aside from the purest light, and plunging into the utmost darkness.

The disciples of the blessed Jesus have indeed, on some occasions, asserted their superiority over the teachers of philosophy. The former have submitted to the direction of a law, which they thought in all momentous points unequivocal, intelligible, and obligatory. The latter, with whatever ingenuity they might sometimes paint virtue, were yet unsteady in their notions, and in their practice seldom consistent. But the accusation may justly be retorted, if the Gospel was intended only as a rule of thinking — if it transformed the promise of eternal life from the more arduous to the easier task — if it recommended virtue without preparing a reward adequate to the labour of following it, and forbade vice without inflicting punishment on the vicious. But, however noisy be the clamour, and however specious the sophisms of fanatics, let not the Christian be in haste to quit that advantageous ground which he has long considered as his own. As reason must have obliged

the philosopher to reject a religion teeming with such absurdities, the Divine wisdom can never make it an object of our assent, much less the instrument of our salvation.

To conclude. The aim of this discourse is to set before you the disgrace that must overtake religion, and the enormities that would prevail in the lives of its professors, were the all-sufficiency of faith universally believed. At the same time, I openly disavow the authority of a rule under which disputants often find a shelter for their disingenuousness or their perverseness—I mean, that men are not always responsible for the consequences of their hypotheses. For accidental consequences they undoubtedly are not accountable; but for such as are probable or necessary, they are and ought to be so. This distinction is, I am sure, daily admitted in the transactions of common life; and religion, which belongs to the important concerns of another, will not, I hope, be made the only subject on which we have the privilege to wanton in paradox without opposition and without rebuke, to alarm the more credulous part of mankind, to stagger the judicious, and unhinge the sincere. When conclusions may be disproved, we have no right to expect the assent of those who differ from us: when they are established, it is rashness in them to refuse attention; to stifle conviction is obstinacy; and to act against it, the most atrocious wickedness.

On a future occasion I shall more largely expostulate with those who allow reason a little share in

explaining Revelation, and who, while they expect to be saved through faith alone, retain some degree of reverence for practical religion, some charity for its well-meaning though mistaken advocates. In the mean time, let me persuade the consistent Christian to preserve his innocence and his tranquillity. The life of Christ was, no doubt, conformable to the will of God. He then who imitates the one, in fact performs the other. And, on this supposition, faith must be the ground of practice. Christianity, says an illustrious father of the church, is the imitation of the Divine nature. Of that nature you all know the characteristic and most important attribute to be goodness; from which activity and wisdom cannot be separated even in idea. If you square your conduct by this exact yet comprehensive definition, you may not be entirely sheltered from the contempt of the ignorant, the intemperate, and the intolerant; but your understandings and your consciences will bear you up against the unmerited censure of mankind. When you have done all that you could do to be saved; when you have made our Saviour's reply to the lawyer's question the rule of your life, and have joined the love of God to that of your neighbour, they will give you the firmest assurance of approbation from the Redeemer, who has both instructed us by his precepts, and encouraged us by his example, to overcome the world.

GEORGE D'OYLY, D.D.

RECTOR OF LAMBETH, AND OF SANDRIDGE IN KENT.

From his "*Sermons chiefly Doctrinal: with Notes.*" Rivingtons. 1827. 8vo.

In his Preface Dr. D'Oyly observes that "the substance of the Sermon on the '*Assurance of Salvation*' was published in the form of an Essay, in 1814, for the office which he then held, of Christian Advocate in the University of Cambridge, and it then passed through two editions. It is now published as a Sermon, in which form it has been delivered from the pulpit, for the purpose of preserving the uniformity of the volume."

ON THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

HEBREWS, vi. 11.

And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

IN this passage the Apostle is manifestly exciting the disciples whom he addressed to activity and exertion in pursuing the great ends of their Christian calling. After informing them, in the verse immediately preceding, that "God is not unrighteous so as to forget their work and labour of love," wherein he alludes to a particular instance of their meritorious conduct in ministering to the saints, he desires that every one of them "do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" that is, that every one of them would practise all the duties of their religion with the same diligence with which they had practised this single duty, in such a manner as to acquire to themselves a firm and stedfast hope of finally attaining, through the merits of their Redeemer, the rewards promised to sincere obedience.

But the true meaning of this passage, as well as that of some other texts of a similar tendency, has sometimes been misunderstood in the Christian

world. The passage has been apprehended as if the expression in the latter clause were not "the full assurance of *hope*," but the full assurance of acceptance with God, and of final salvation following on that acceptance. And, in consequence, the text has been held to afford sanction to the opinion that the faithful Christian, he who has fought the good fight, may expect to attain in this life a full and distinct assurance, a certain anticipated conviction of his salvation; a conviction impressed upon his mind by some perceptible marks which cannot be mistaken, by some express notices which must be felt.

Now, as there is no point of Christian belief in which it is of slight importance that we should think and judge aright, that we should avoid error and embrace the truth; so it is, in some respects, peculiarly important that this opinion should not be embraced on insufficient grounds, and without due examination of the foundation on which it rests. For, besides the tendency which such an opinion must ever have to make men rather watch the state of their feelings, than attend to the quality of their actions; rather wait in passive supineness for perceptible notices and impressions to be made on their minds, than employ themselves actively and steadily in the discharge of their practical duties; it cannot fail to be productive of much desponding apprehension on the one hand, of much arrogant presumption on the other. Those Christians, whose temper is of a less ardent and presumptuous cast, conscious that they feel no assurance of their sal-

vation, which yet they are persuaded, if they were in a state of acceptance with God, they would feel, must naturally be weighed down with the heaviest gloom and alarm respecting their spiritual state; while others, of a sanguine and enthusiastic turn, working themselves into the belief that they really feel this assurance, will too easily be elevated with spiritual arrogance and presumption, and seduced into the most dangerous of all conditions, a condition of false security respecting their prospects of final salvation.

Since therefore the influence of this doctrine on the feelings and practices of Christians must be obviously pernicious in various ways; and since the doctrine itself, as there is reason to apprehend, is more prevalent than might be wished, being intimately interwoven with other enthusiastical opinions current at the present day; I propose to consider, in as short a compass, and in as plain a manner as I conveniently can, whether the doctrine do really rest on that solid foundation which can entitle it to the belief of Christians.

The doctrine has been founded, as appears from consulting the writings of those who maintain it, on two distinct grounds; on the authority of Scripture, and on the personal experience of many devout Christians. But, contrary to what ought to be done by all considerate enquirers after truth, the supporters of it seem to have attended principally to the alleged experience and information of those Christians who have professed to feel these assur-

ances, and to have adverted only in a secondary manner to the authority of those Scriptures, from which all our knowledge of religious truth must ever be derived.

However, since the written word of God is our entire rule of faith; and since, provided a doctrine, so important as this is, be indeed true, we must assuredly find very clear and distinct traces of it in Scripture; I will make it my first and immediate business to enquire whether, by any texts directly affirming it, or leaving it to be indirectly inferred, such scriptural authority do really exist.

Now, with a view to this enquiry, it is important, in the first place, to observe, that the general character universally recommended to Christians is one which ill consists with the opinion, that they can, under any circumstances, attain in this life a certain assurance of their salvation. The tendency of such an assurance must ever be, to excite in those who possess it a presumption of superior holiness, a conscious feeling of proud satisfaction, confidence, and exultation. On the other hand, the temper recommended in every part of Scripture — earnestly, repeatedly, and peremptorily recommended, as prominently and essentially characterising every true disciple of Christ — is that of lowliness, meekness, and humility, that from which every particle of self-righteousness and self-exaltation is excluded. "Blessed are the poor in spirit:" "blessed are the meek."* We are to "put on meekness and humbleness of mind†;" "to be

* Matt. v. 3. 5. † Coloss. iii. 12.

clothed with humility*," "to become as little children."† "Whosoever exalteth himself, shall be abased."‡ "When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants." §

Again, the precepts enjoined upon us in every part of Scripture are extremely earnest in commanding Christians to be ever pressing forward towards the prize of their high calling, never to faint by the way, never to relax their exertions, to go on still to perfection, to watch without ceasing. "Let him," says St. Paul, "that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." ‖ "What I say unto you," says our Saviour, "I say unto all, Watch." ¶ Perhaps there is no one precept which is more frequently repeated in the New Testament, under different forms, than this. We are commanded** to be sober and vigilant; to watch unto prayer; to look to ourselves; to stand fast; to walk circumspectly; to watch with all perseverance, not to fall from our own stedfastness. We are further told that blessed are those servants whom our Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. These and many other precepts are addressed to all Christians without any exception; not to those only who are far removed from a state of Christian holiness and perfection, but to those also who are most advanced in the path of Christian holiness and perfection. There is no exception from

* 1 Pet. v. 5. † Matt. xviii. 3. ‡ Luke, xiv. 11.
§ Luke, xvii. 10. ‖ 1 Cor. x. 12. ¶ Mark, xiii. 37.
** 1 Pet. v. 8. iv. 7. 2 John, viii. 1 Cor. xvi. 13. Eph. v. 15. Id. vi. 18. Luke, xii. 37.

the obligation of these duties in favour of any Christians who have attained to a state in which their salvation is secured; no one expression tending to sanction the opinion that such a state, in which watchfulness may be relaxed, can ever be attained; but, on the contrary, the terms in which the precepts are expressed strongly lead us to a directly opposite conclusion. Here then, to say the least, is a strong presumptive proof against the opinion I am considering. Our blessed Lord and his Apostles, we well know, always adapted their instructions to the wants and necessities of their disciples; and if their disciples could ever attain to a condition in which these exhortations to watchfulness, so frequently repeated, would not be required by them, some notice of such a condition would assuredly have been afforded. Let it not be urged that a relaxation of guarded watchfulness is not a necessary consequence of a presumed feeling of assurance; and that such a feeling, acting on a devout and well-regulated mind, may rather tend to produce increased exertions in the cause of Christian holiness. We are reasoning, be it remembered, concerning human beings; beings ever prone to evil, ever apt to yield to temptation, ever requiring the influence of pressing motives to make them adhere steadily to their duty. And if it be allowed that the hope of securing the favour of God to the purposes of final salvation must ever be the great operating motive in producing virtuous practice, it surely will not be doubted that, wherever a belief and persuasion prevail that the victory is

already obtained, that this final salvation is already secured, there it is too probable that the Christian warrior will slumber on his post, that his watchfulness will fail, that his exertions will be relaxed, in the prosecution of his spiritual warfare.

Finding then that the general purport of scriptural language is strong and decisive against that temper of mind which must inevitably flow from this doctrine of assurance; and inferring thence, by no improbable conjecture, that there can be no passages which directly affirm the doctrine; let us briefly advert to those texts of Scripture from which a support for it has sometimes been presumed.

And, in so doing, the first passage which claims our attention is that which has been cited in my text: "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

The word in the original*, here rendered "full assurance," literally signifies full bearing or full possession. It seems to be a metaphor taken from the bearing of fruit by trees; and, as it is here applied, it appears properly to signify "the full bearing" of hope, the abundance of hope, in the soul. Thus then, by the expression rendered "the full assurance of hope unto the end" cannot possibly be meant the certainty, the assured feeling, of obtaining final salvation; but merely the full measure, the abundance, the full possession of the *hope* that we shall obtain. All Scripture proclaims to us the truth, that the

* Πληροφορια.

faithful and obedient Christian is cheered, as he proceeds in his course, with a growing hope and anticipation of his acceptance with God; that, as he advances by successive steps in purifying his soul from the stains of sin, as he approaches nearer unto God, as he rises in his affections from earth to heaven, his hopes may continually grow in strength, although they will be held with humility, that he will finally be received into mercy. But how widely different is an assurance of hope such as this from a positive assurance or notice sensibly impressed of the salvation being secured. The one is ever tempered with lowliness and fear; the other directly tends to spiritual pride and presumption. The one tells that although much has already been done, yet much more remains to be done, and enough never can be done; the other reposes on the idea that all has already been accomplished, that the warfare is finished, that the victory is completed. The one impels to increasing endeavours after holiness and perfection, because the end to which they are directed never can be made sure in this life: the other tends to a relaxation of all such endeavours, under the notion that the end is already attained and made secure. In different parts of this same Epistle, St. Paul speaks, in one passage, of our holding fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end; in a second, of our holding the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. The general sense and purport of all these passages is the same; in all the Apostle is speaking not of a vain presumptuous feeling of

assurance in the minds of Christians respecting their final salvation, but of a rational and well-grounded, a firm, though humble hope, built on the merits of Christ's redemption, and confirmed by the consciousness of that steady performance of Christian duties which results from a sincere faith in his availing name.

Another passage * in which the word "assure" is employed has sometimes been adduced in support of this opinion. The passage is this:—"Hereby," that is, "by loving our brethren in deed and in truth," as the preceding verse explains, "we know that we are of the truth, and shall *assure* our hearts before him." Doubts have been entertained whether the rendering by the word "assure" gives the most appropriate and true meaning of the original. The word † thus translated signifies literally to persuade; in a derived sense, to appease, and also to give confidence to. Thus, not without some reason, it has been proposed to render the passage, "we shall pacify, or quiet, our hearts before him," that is, shall so pacify our hearts or consciences as to prevent their accusing us of deficiency in our Christian duties; a translation which seems to be supported by the following verse, which speaks of "our hearts condemning us." But, if the more received sense be adhered to, how shall we by any possibility consider the words as intimating that every individual Christian, by displaying true charity towards his neighbours, will attain a positive assurance of his

* 1 John, iii. 19. † Πείθω.

own salvation? Surely the clear and obvious meaning must be, that, by displaying true Christian charity, the fruit of a sincere faith, we shall assure, strengthen, give confidence to our hearts before him, shall derive firm confidence to ourselves that we are performing properly our Christian duties, and paying to him true and acceptable service.

I proceed to a text addressed by the Apostle St. Paul to the Romans, which has often been alleged in support of this doctrine. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." * This sentence has sometimes been taken separately from its context, and adduced as an undoubted proof that the Holy Spirit bears a clear and perceptible testimony in the minds of individual Christians, that they are the chosen and adopted sons of God. But a very slight consideration of the text, when viewed as it stands in the writings of the Apostle, will prove to us that its real meaning is widely different from that which has been stated. The Apostle, in this part of his Epistle, is exhorting the Christians whom he addressed to bring forth the genuine fruits of their faith, by living, not after the flesh, but after the spirit. In the preceding verse he had said, "Ye," who are Christians, "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear," ye are not subject to the slavish fear of the wrath of God, and to the consequences of that wrath, as were the Jews under their dispensation, but "ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;" that is, ye are the

* Rom. viii. 16.

adopted children of God, ye are inspired by the Gospel with those lively hopes and encouragements which enable you to apply to God, as a kind and merciful Father. He then adds, in the two following verses, " The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." His meaning evidently is, the Holy Spirit of God, whose gifts and graces we Christians experience, confirms the testimony of our hearts and consciences that we are the children of God; and, if children, then heirs, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be (or upon this condition) that, like our Redeemer, we pay a dutiful obedience to the will of our heavenly Father, in bearing patiently the sufferings which may befal us in the cause of righteousness; for then, and only then, we shall be glorified together with Christ. Thus, then, it is very clear that this text bears not the most distant reference to the assurance of individual Christians respecting their own particular salvation. It solely and entirely refers to the general assurance which all Christians have, an assurance built in their hearts and consciences by faith in the promises and reliance on the merits of Christ, and confirmed by the encouraging influence of the Holy Spirit, that, if they perform the duties which their religion requires, they will be owned and received as the adopted children of God, and rewarded with admission into that glorious in-

heritance which he has promised to his obedient servants.

In adverting to other scriptural authorities which have been alleged in support of the doctrine I am considering, it will readily be allowed that several passages occur which speak of our *knowing* that we are in God, of our *knowing* that we have eternal life, that we have passed from death unto life. A very brief consideration, however, of these particular texts will satisfactorily prove to us that all these expressions imply a general knowledge of the advantages which result from the Gospel dispensation; a full trust in the completion of the gracious promises therein made by God to his faithful servants; a strong and well-grounded hope of future happiness, which must ever flow from sincere endeavours after holiness of life; but that they in no instance countenance the notion of a positive conviction and conscious assurance in the minds of individuals, that their salvation has been secured.

Thus St. John in his first Epistle says, "Whoso keepeth his word, in him is verily the love of God perfected; hereby *know we* that we are in him."* He is discoursing in this passage on the necessity of our proving, by keeping the commandments of Christ, that we are his true disciples, and have a real and lively faith in his atoning merits. He had said in the verse preceding, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." But he adds, on the other

* 1 John, xi. 5.

hand, "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him." In this sentence it is very evident that he is stating a general truth, opposed to that of the preceding verse; viz., that he who duly keeps the word of God shows forth in his practice the perfect love of God; and "hereby," he says,—that is, by keeping the word of God, which is the fruit of a sincere and perfect love of God,—we and all Christians know that we dwell in him, that we become true members of his church, that we become really united to him in heart and affection, and may have well-grounded hopes, through the merits of our Redeemer, of obtaining from his favour final and everlasting rewards.

Again, says the same Apostle, "*We know* that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."* Here, as in other parts of this general Epistle, he is addressing not particular individual Christians, but the Christian body at large. Now surely it can scarcely be supposed that he is informing or reminding all whom he addressed, that, "because they love the brethren," they have arrived at a state in which every individual has received a full assurance of his own salvation. He is pointing out the consolations which all true Christians derive from their faith under trial and persecution. "Marvel not," were his words in the verse immediately preceding, "my brethren, if the world hate you: we know that we have passed from death unto life, be-

* 1 John, iii. 14.

cause we love the brethren;" where he evidently tells them that, because they have shown forth the sincerity of their Christian faith, by cultivating that cardinal Christian virtue, charity towards their fellow-creatures, they know that "they have passed from death unto life," that they have exchanged a state in which death would have been their portion, in which no compensation for present suffering would have awaited them in futurity, for a state in which they are animated to the steady endurance of present evil, and to the zealous discharge of duties enjoined upon them, by the firm and solid hope of obtaining the blessings of eternal life.

Another text of the same Apostle will illustrate more fully the sense in which these and similar expressions are to be understood. "These things," he says, "I have written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." He is here manifestly stating the motive which had induced him to address them; and this motive was, that they might "*know* that they have eternal life." Now it is impossible for a moment to believe the Apostle's meaning to be, that his purpose in writing to them was, that every individual amongst them who should attend to what he had written would receive an undoubted internal assurance of his salvation. Unquestionably, in conformity with what is necessarily required by the context, and with what is alone consistent with rational views of the subject, we must understand him to mean, that he wrote for the purpose of con-

veying to them a knowledge of eternal life; a knowledge of those saving truths, the true and efficacious belief of which would lead to their everlasting salvation.

But the Apostle St. Paul, in a passage of his Epistle to the Hebrews, affords a no less clear illustration of the manner in which scriptural expressions of this nature are to be understood. He says*, "Ye had compassion on me in my bonds, *knowing* in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." In this passage it is evident that he is stating the great and worthy motive, by which they were induced to show compassion towards him in his bonds. He cannot certainly be supposed to say, that they displayed this kind and Christian temper because each individual amongst them was assured of his own salvation; but because they knew *generally* that they had in prospect a more enduring substance in the heavens; because they were animated by the full persuasion that, however they might sacrifice their interests in the present life, they were certain of obtaining through the mercies of their Redeemer a most abundant recompense in the life to come.

I have now adverted to all the principal texts from which support to the doctrine before us has been presumed; and I think it may safely be affirmed, that, when their real meaning is duly considered, they are found to afford no sanction

* Heb. x. 34.

whatever to the opinions which they have been adduced to sanction.

But it is argued on the other side, that, whatever may be the true sense of particular exhortations and expressions in the writings of the Apostles, and whatever the inferences to be derived from them, there is a great example, no less than that of St. Paul himself, in favour of the doctrine of assurance; for St. Paul, by his own expression, towards the close of his life, appears to have felt *assured* that there was laid up for him a crown of glory. His words are, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." *

Before, however, the example of St. Paul be alleged for the proof of this doctrine, as applicable to Christians in general, two circumstances should be well considered.

In the first place, we not only have no reason to suppose that the early Apostles of our holy religion —they to whom spiritual aids and blessings were imparted in a degree far more than ordinary— were, in the general course of their lives, favoured with any assurance of their salvation; but even respecting St. Paul himself, as to his general state during the arduous labours of his apostleship, we have the very reverse proved by no less authority than his own. For he describes himself as being

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

continually in a state of spiritual struggle and warfare, as having need of watchful circumspection, and as subject to doubts and fears. In one passage of his writings he says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God*:" in a former part of the same chapter he had said, "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect †;" expressions which directly prove that he had not then attained the mark, that he still fell short of perfection, and that, in consequence, he could not be in a state in which he felt assured of his salvation. Again he says, what is still stronger, "I keep my body under and bring it into subjection, lest—I myself should be a cast-away ‡:" hereby most clearly expressing that he knew himself to be still in a state of discipline, still subject to temptations from within and from without, still having need of care and self-restraint, to prevent his being overcome by those temptations; and, therefore, as far as possible removed from a state in which he felt assured as to his final salvation. If then such was the general state of St. Paul's feelings respecting himself, how much more must we suppose that all ordinary Christians must be left in a similar state. If one, who was a chosen Apostle of the Gospel, favoured with direct communications from the Deity himself, and selected to be a blessed instrument of carrying into all lands the tidings of salvation; if even he was left, during the general course of his life, without any assurance of his final

* Philip. iii. 14. † Id. iii. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

salvation, how strong an argument is afforded, that no such assurance is ever to be vouchsafed, under any circumstances, to ordinary Christians.

But, in the second place, under what circumstances does St. Paul assert, in terms of conscious exultation, that there was "laid up for him a crown of righteousness?" At a time when we have every reason to believe that he had received an express revelation of his approaching martyrdom; for he had said in the preceding verse, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." He would surely have been very far from expressing himself in terms such as these respecting his approaching departure, if the foreknowledge of that event had not been miraculously communicated to him; and still farther would he have been from uttering so confident an expectation of receiving "a crown of righteousness," if a similar revelation had not been expressly made to him of the bright reward which awaited his faithful services. Allowing then this to have been the fact, which is no less clearly to be inferred from the Apostle's own words than it has constantly been believed in the Christian church, we see that the case of St. Paul stands completely by itself: it is the case not merely of a Christian, but of a tried and approved Apostle of Christianity; of one to whom Divine revelations and spiritual gifts were imparted in an extraordinary measure. It therefore can never, by any legitimate deduction, be alleged as an example applying to

Christians in general, in the ordinary condition of the Christian church.

Since then, as I trust it has appeared, the general spirit of the scriptural precepts is adverse to this doctrine of assurance; since the particular texts, which are usually produced in support of it, do not in fact support it when their real sense is ascertained; and since the example of St. Paul can never be considered as applicable to the situation of Christians in general; it may safely be affirmed that the doctrine is to be deemed entirely destitute of all scriptural authority. The foundation of it rests therefore altogether on the alleged experience of individual Christians. Now, when we find individuals, whose veracity is unsuspected, confidently asserting the fact, that they have themselves felt an assurance of their own salvation perceptibly impressed on their minds by God's Holy Spirit, it may seem scarcely possible to doubt the truth of what they affirm.

Still we may, perhaps, do so on some very reasonable grounds.

For, in the first place, it is a fact no less confirmed by general experience, than singular in its nature, that the feelings of men in general, and especially of those whose temperament is warm and enthusiastic, are extremely delusive, and can never so be trusted as to afford a *proof* of any position or opinion which the individual maintains. Let a person of an enthusiastic turn of mind once become convinced that he ought, under particular

circumstances, to experience some particular feelings, and he will soon work himself into the conviction that he actually does experience them. As a full and sufficient proof of this, it may safely be affirmed that there has scarcely ever existed an enthusiast of any description, whose feelings have not been very soon enlisted into the support of his opinions, and who has not supposed himself to experience a positive assurance of those truths of which he was already convinced. Thus then, in every such case, when an individual professes to feel internal notices and impressions, we may be fully convinced that he himself is firmly persuaded he ought to feel them; but, as long as the supposed evidence of his feelings remains unsupported by some external test, no weight whatever will be attached by any reflecting person to the proof which they afford.

In the second place, we have the strongest scriptural grounds for believing, that, in the case of ordinary Christians, perceptible notices are never impressed upon their minds by the Holy Spirit of God. This spirit exercises its sacred and availing influence, by suggesting emotions, inclinations, and affections, which cannot be distinguished from the natural operations and movements of the human mind. That the gifts of the spirit are graciously bestowed on Christians in the measure in which they are deserved, is most sound and scriptural doctrine. We have general grounds for referring to its co-operation all the better movements of our will, all the holier dispositions of our hearts. But

still no ordinary Christian is authorised by Scripture to refer this or that particular feeling of his mind, decidedly and unequivocally, to the Holy Spirit. Thus, then, no one can be positively certain that he receives a particular impression of the assurance of his salvation from the Holy Spirit; for he cannot be certain that he does not mistake for such an impression the suggestion of his own too presumptuous and confident feelings.

In the third place, if it were true that such assurance of salvation is ever felt by perfect and regenerate Christians, it would be felt, not partially and by a few, but generally by all who have attained to such triumph in their spiritual warfare. It would ill accord with the equal dealings of God, to grant this assurance to some Christians, while he withheld it from others in the same spiritual state. Now there are, and have been, undoubtedly, a very large number of Christians, the most sincere, the most holy, the most devout,—Christians, who, as far as outward appearances could show, have approached as near to heavenly perfection as human infirmity can permit, and yet who have not made the slightest pretension to any such feeling of the assurance of their salvation. All holy Christians, indeed, have expressed a firm and religious trust in the atoning merits of their Lord and Saviour; have been animated by an ardent and swelling hope of better things to come; have received from the Holy Spirit those blessed gifts of calm composure and toward peace, which are the richest meed of holi-

ness here below: but they have expressed nothing whatever respecting a notice written as it were on their hearts, an assurance sensibly impressed on their feelings, of their salvation being secured. If, then, any argument can be drawn from the experience of those Christians who have alleged themselves to feel these assurances, a fully counteracting argument must be drawn from the experience of numberless other holy persons who have never felt them, and who, we cannot doubt, would have been favoured with them, if it were ever consistent with the Divine plans to afford them.

If then the doctrine of the assurance of salvation derive no better support from the supposed experience of individuals, than from the authority of those scriptural texts on which it has been grounded, it surely is of some importance that Christians should be duly cautioned against a notion, which may too probably lead to serious practical delusions.

It must be vain to urge, that many persons may have maintained this doctrine themselves, and may have proposed it to be maintained by others, in so cautious and guarded a manner, as to deprive it of any real tendency to generate spiritual pride, to diminish spiritual watchfulness, or to encourage listless inactivity. As it must ever be understood by ordinary Christians, it must tend to produce error and delusion. Persuade a person that he ought, when he is in a state of salvation, to receive a clear notice of it sensibly impressed on his feelings; and

his attention will be immediately called off from the steady discharge of his Christian duties; he will think *less* of preparing himself for a state of salvation, and *more* of the internal proofs which he expects, that he *is* in a state of salvation; he will wait in passive indolence till he shall hear the call of the Spirit, till he shall feel a sudden illumination bursting on his mind. And he may easily work himself into the persuasion that he actually does hear this call, and perceive this inward light, when he is very far removed from real spiritual holiness. But let him once become persuaded of this, and an opening is made at once for a very unchristian spirit, and for very careless practice; he may now indulge in some feelings of pride and exultation, for he is become a chosen vessel, an adopted son of God, having received the seal of the Spirit; he is now a being far superior to those his fellow-creatures, who have still occasion to bring their earthly passions under subjection, are still struggling with sin, still wandering in darkness; he has no longer occasion for watchfulness against temptations; he is no longer called upon to be very strenuous in the discharge of active duties: if he should lapse into occasional sins of infirmity, it is of no ultimate importance; for he has already performed his part, and his salvation is secured. Most necessary is it indeed to beware against encouraging the belief of an opinion which, in its obvious effects on the disposition and conduct of human beings, is pregnant with such important evil.

Nor let it be thought that the delusions which arise from this source are either infrequent or unimportant. Instances* are not of rare occurrence, in which persons of lives notoriously the most abandoned, perhaps criminals about to suffer under the hands of public justice, are encouraged by incautious or injudicious teachers to indulge the feeling, that by turning to their Saviour with penitence and prayer in their latest stage, they are likely to re-

* I am tempted to quote the following excellent remarks connected with this subject by the late learned and pious Rev. Thomas Rennell, in his Introduction to an edition of the Narrative of the Conversion and Death of Count Struensee:— "To promise," he says, "to the sinner the highest degree of bliss and glory, and to encourage in his mind the feelings of enthusiastic triumph, is a line of conduct unwarranted at once by experience and by Scripture. How often in these days do we see the unhappy criminal sent out of the world by his spiritual attendants in all the ecstasies of fanatical assurance, and generally without having performed any one act by which his repentance could be accounted sincere, without confession, without even a desire of making reparation. But Munter (the minister who attended Struensee) would encourage no other feelings but those of a calm, steady, and scriptural faith in the propitiation of the Redeemer, and a confidence of pardon through his blood. A more difficult task cannot, perhaps, be imposed upon the Christian minister, than so to preserve the balance of feeling in the mind of his penitent as to prevent hope from growing into presumption, and faith into enthusiasm; to repress the risings of unwarrantable triumph, without diminishing the assurance of pardon and acceptance. The returning prodigal was received with joy into his Father's mansion; but what was his lot after his reception the Gospel has not revealed."—*Rennell's Introd.* p. xxiii. xxiv.

ceive from the Holy Spirit a clear and distinct assurance of their salvation being secured; and thus, after having perhaps only for a few hours bestowed any serious thoughts on their spiritual condition, they often quit these earthly scenes, not in the lowliness and abasement of contrite sinners, but with a degree of confidence and exultation which would be very unbecoming even in the Christian whose life had been the best and most perfect. But, surely, to encourage such feelings and to hold out such expectations, is very far to depart from the true doctrine of the Gospel. Certain it is, that even the worst of sinners are forbidden to despair of receiving the merciful forgiveness of their Saviour; and all should be earnestly exhorted to spend whatever portion may remain to them of life in sincere repentance and humble prayer. The forgiving Father may at any time receive his returning prodigal. The good Shepherd may, even at the latest period, receive the wandering sheep into his fold. All is concealed from the knowledge of man; all rests with that mercy which knows no bounds. But, since there is no warranty in holy writ for encouraging any Christians to expect a distinct previous notice of the forgiveness of their sins, so it must be, on every ground, most improper to instil into them such an expectation. By so doing, delusion will be propagated both in the minds of the individuals themselves, and of others. False security and spiritual pride will be too certainly generated; and the sinner be brought to a frame and temper ill

consisting with that true contrition and humility which his condition requires.

But, while we thus believe, on grounds apparently the most solid, that the expectation of a distinct and perceptible assurance in the minds of individuals of their own salvation is an error no less unscriptural and unsound in its foundation than pernicious in its obvious consequences; still there is an assurance of another description, which every faithful Christian may reasonably hope to experience; still there is another sense, in which the Holy Spirit does "bear witness with the spirits of good Christians, that they are the children of God." This Holy Spirit does exercise his availing influence in giving strength to their faith, warmth to their devotion, and extension to their hopes. He does enable them so to persevere with steadiness in their spiritual course, so to produce the genuine fruits of true holiness, so to exhibit the fairest graces of the Christian character, as to obtain in this life a happy foretaste of those joys which are the promised recompense of sincere obedience. The Holy Spirit does impart to the faithful Christian that steady assurance of a rich and animating hope which is built on a true faith in the merits of Christ, and on a consciousness of sincere endeavours to obey his commands; that assurance which, instead of generating false security, or careless indifference, or slumbering inattention, or self-sufficient arrogance, urges, by the most operative of all motives, towards in-

creasing endeavours after holiness, increasing watchfulness against temptations, increasing piety towards God; which, presenting to his view, as he advances towards the goal of life, a nearer and more certain prospect of "the prize of his high calling," enables him to dart forward a glance of joyful anticipation towards the bright scenes of futurity, and to meet, at the last, the hour of his dissolution, in the well-grounded trust of receiving "a crown of righteousness," with the saints which are made perfect in heaven.

THE ALLIANCE OF RELIGION AND LEARNING.

[Preached on Commencement Sunday before the University of Cambridge.]

JOHN, viii. 12.

I am the light of the world.

IT admits of no question, that our Lord applies this expression, in a primary sense, to himself, as the dispenser to mankind of the most valuable of all knowledge, the knowledge of true religion. His apostle St. John, in the opening portion of his Gospel*, speaks of him in similar terms, as "a light which shineth in darkness," and as "the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

And who does not at once acknowledge the propriety of these expressions? Who does not perceive that, as the great natural light which adorns the firmament dispels, with its rising beams the shades of darkness which envelope the earth, so he, the Sun of Righteousness, chased away the spiritual darkness which covered the minds of men, and poured into them the bright effulgence of heavenly truth? Before his appearance upon earth, mankind

* John, i. 5. 9.

were lost in ignorance and error. Their understandings were darkened as to all that regarded their relation to the great God and Father of all, and the true end and destiny of their being. Ignorant of him to whom alone the heart of man should turn with prayer and adoration, they paid unhallowed service to them which were no gods. They were destitute of any sure foundation of religious or moral duty. They possessed no certain rule to guide them in life; still less were they blessed with any solid or availing hope in death. But when, in a spiritual sense, God commanded that light should be, the darkness fled. Our blessed Lord taught men to know the supreme, invisible, and only God, and to worship him in spirit and in truth. He instructed them in those paths of duty which lead to their surest happiness. He "brought to light life and immortality," teaching from the highest of all authorities that most momentous of all truths, that all mankind are placed here in a state of preparation for an eternal state, and that their condition in that eternal state depends entirely on their present conduct.

But while it was undoubtedly in this primary sense that our blessed Saviour applied to himself the words of my text, "I am the light of the world," we may, I conceive, with full propriety, consider the words as implying, in a remoter sense, that the tendency and the effect of that religion which he came to establish was to spread intellectual light in the world, to encourage generally, and to extend

the cultivation of all useful knowledge amongst mankind. And if the text may without impropriety be received in this secondary sense, it speaks, when so received, an unquestionable truth. For it is most true, that one great effect of Christianity has been to civilise and to enlighten the world, to awaken in men a spirit of emulation and a desire of improvement, to expand and to elevate their minds to a higher tone of thinking and of acting, to stimulate them to praiseworthy exertion in the cultivation of all those branches of various learning, by which their social and moral condition is adorned and improved.

It is my purpose, then, to take advantage of this text, to call your attention to a brief consideration of the important fact, that Christianity and human learning have always maintained, one with the other, a close and intimate alliance, have gone hand in hand, have given and received mutual assistance and support. The subject is under all circumstances interesting and important; but it is peculiarly entitled to attention within the precincts of the venerable establishments which now surround us, which have been erected and endowed by pious and benevolent founders, for the express purpose that sound religion and useful learning might therein jointly flourish and abound.

There have not been wanting writers* who have made the bold assertion, that human learning is hostile to the cause of Revelation. They have been

* See Lord Bolingbroke's Works, 8vo. vol. iii. p. 43, &c.

willing to insinuate that the religion of Christ has in great measure owed its reception in the world to the ignorance which has overspread the minds of men. They have even ventured to state as a fact in proof of their position, that the resurrection of letters after the darkness of the middle ages was a period fatal to Christianity, and that since that period this religion has been on the decline.

These are indeed affirmations which must startle at first sight every considerate friend to Revelation, and make him deeply anxious to know whether they have the slightest semblance of truth for their foundation. If they were true, a most serious presumption against Christianity itself would undoubtedly arise; for how many would deem it probable from this fact alone, that a religion which is indebted to ignorance for its reception may be founded in error. If they were true, those respected individuals who have raised, in this and other places, great institutions for the joint purpose of promoting religion and learning, have acted on a mistaken principle; have endeavoured to embrace in one design objects which are incompatible with each other; have, by striving to advance the cultivation of human learning, been unwarily sapping the foundation of that religion which they also intended to support. If, further, these affirmations were true, how painful would be the reflection to many of the great sons of science, to those who have spent their weary hours in curious investigation and laborious research, which they destined for the

good of their fellow-creatures,—how painful would be to them the reflection, that by every ray of the light of science which they have contributed to shed, they have cast a shade on the cause of Christianity; that, by every step of advance which they have made in climbing the heights of recondite and liberal learning, they have, however undesignedly, and in opposition to their anxious wishes, contributed to deprive men of the firm hold of that religion, which, as universal experience tells us, must constitute to all the surest source of joy and peace in life, the only hope and consolation in death.

But, undoubtedly, these affirmations are not, cannot be, true. Christianity is not allied to ignorance, has been in no sense or degree founded upon it. It did not owe its first reception in the world to the darkness of the times in which it rose: for if ever a period of antiquity is to be named in which learning and civilisation were at their height, it is that very period at which the founder of our holy religion appeared upon earth; as if it was the express design of Providence, in so ordering the course of events, to prove to mankind that the wisdom which is from above could triumph over the wisdom of this world; and that persons of minds unimproved by education, and destitute of all assistances of human learning, could, when aided with the power of Divine truth, effect more for the edification of the world than any heathen moralists ever could effect. Again, let us call to mind to

whom did the early Apostles especially address themselves, and where were their labours crowned with the happiest success? They did not merely address themselves to persons of unimproved minds, or converse in obscure villages, where the light of civilisation had scarcely penetrated: but they published the truth in the most polished capitals of the heathen world, at Athens, at Rome, at Corinth, at Ephesus; in places where all that was then attainable of science and of learning was concentrated, and where the powers of the human mind had received their highest degree of expansion and improvement. Christianity has not since owed its continued reception in the world to the ignorance of men: for it has been maintained in its most genuine purity in those countries which are most enlightened by science; and, as we are encouraged from all appearances to hope, it will ever strike its roots deeper and spread its branches wider, in proportion as the understandings of men are more opened to the perception of truth, by cultivation and improvement.

The assertion, then, of the fact, that the resurrection of letters was prejudicial to the cause of Christianity, is to be met by a positive denial. It may be proved to be contrary to the truth, whether we regard the general prevalence of its spirit and principles, and the influence of its precepts over the hearts and the lives of individuals; or whether we advert to its visible establishment and exten-

sion over the different countries of the known world.

True it unquestionably is, that if we could consent to admit that Christianity is injured by being purified from corruptions, we could not do otherwise than allow that the revival of letters was injurious to its interests; for, unquestionably, that revival was the direct mean of removing the impure additions which human weakness and error had engrafted on the genuine stock. But what reflecting person, who rightly understands his religion as it is in Christ Jesus, will for a moment admit, that to purify Christianity from such corruptions as then prevailed was to injure its sacred cause, or to impair its genuine influence? Who will not rather allow that this was to confer upon it the most valuable service, to promote its real interests in the most effectual manner? It may safely be admitted that the revival of letters after the darkness of the middle ages has decidedly proved prejudicial to those superstitions and abuses which had gathered round Christianity, and had defaced its genuine form. Those abuses, adverse as in most instances they were to its true spirit as well as its direct precept, would never have been attempted, still less would have been patiently acquiesced in for so many centuries, had not the minds of men been bound down by the iron chains of ignorance. But as soon as the cause ceased to operate, the effect rapidly gave way. As soon as the light of mental improvement began to prevail, the dark mists of superstition and reli-

gious corruption were in great measure dispelled. That glorious era in the history of the church of Christ ensued, which brought back, in many countries of Christendom, the religion of the Gospel to its original purity and simplicity, cleared it from all that superstition or fraud or ignorance had annexed to it, and presented it in that genuine form of loveliness which it was designed by its Divine Author to bear. It is well known, indeed, that accidental and political causes, many of them wholly unconnected with religion, occasioned immediate resistance to the popish usurpations, and led in their immediate effect to the Reformation. But had not those particular causes existed, that Reformation could not have been long delayed. The seeds of it were already sown, and must have burst forth. The real causes of it lay in the improvements which were taking place in the state of the human mind; and those causes, sooner or later, must have had their operation.

Thus the resurrection of letters was, indisputably, not hostile, but friendly and beneficial to genuine Christianity. It tore from it all that the weakness or the wantonness of man's reason had added to the pure word of God. The unhealthy excrescences which had formed upon this goodly tree were then lopped off; but the trunk itself remained uninjured and entire—remained to flourish with its original majesty and beauty and glory, to spread wide its branches in every direction, and to afford a con-

tinual increase of peace and consolation to all who repose under its sacred shade.

And who will not allow that the true spirit of Christianity has more prevailed, and its power over the hearts of individuals increased, as far as we can judge from visible effects, since the lights of literature and civilisation have been shed upon the Christian world? During the dark ages of barbarism, it is too well known, how little, in many instances, existed of Christianity besides the outward name and form. A blind submission to the implicit authority of fallible man was substituted for obedience to the infallible rule of God's law. The Bible was a sealed book to the mass of the people. The waters of salvation, so pure at the original source, were conveyed to the lips of men through impure and corrupting channels. Hence it was, that a religion, which especially addresses itself to the heart of man, was in a great measure made to consist in a multitude of outward unmeaning forms. Hence it was, that its genuine principles were well nigh forgotten in the world, and its sacred name used to sanction many practices most abhorrent from all that it commands. But, since the revival of letters, the true spirit of Christianity has been more generally felt, and its influence far more apparent in the public and private conduct of the Christian world. Much as every true servant of his Redeemer may still have reason to lament that, even in those countries where its purest forms are established, too many are Christians rather in name

than in spirit, still it may be mentioned as a fact beyond all question, that, throughout the Christian world in general, its duties are in these later days more correctly understood and more generally practised. Christians, having been enabled to drink the waters of salvation at the fountain head, have learned to feel more strongly the powerful obligations which their religion imposes upon them. They have learned that, in order to become Christians indeed, they must imbibe its sacred influence into their hearts; that they must turn to their Redeemer with repentance and with faith; with repentance, not consisting merely in the outward forms of penance, but seated in the inmost feelings, and producing a change of conduct; with faith, not lifeless and unproductive, but bearing good fruits in the life and conversation. Hence devotion has been quickened; Christian charity has been better understood; Christian principles have been displayed more fully in all the relations of social life. Nor is it only in those countries where the Reformation has been established that the true spirit of Christianity has, since the revival of literature, obtained a greater influence. Even where corruptions still prevail with little abatement, a milder spirit has obtained. Where nothing has been reformed in name, much has been reformed in fact; here too the fierceness of persecution has been moderated, asperities have been softened, and mutual enmity abated; many unchristian practices have ceased, and more of the

true spirit of religion is perceptible in public and in private conduct.

But, if we further turn our views to the visible spread of Christianity over the regions of the globe, we shall find additional reason for denying the assertion, that the resurrection of letters has been prejudicial to this sacred cause. However the true believer in Christ may lament, on surveying the known portions of our habitable globe, that now, after the lapse of so many centuries, millions of human beings still continue immersed in the darkness of heathen superstitions; yet he cannot hesitate to allow that in these later days the light of true religion has penetrated to whole climes to which it was before unknown. Together with the revival of letters there arose a spirit of enterprise and activity in the Christian world; commerce was extended, arts were improved, wealth was accumulated. Hence colonies from Christian lands have been established in many countries which were before completely barbarous; and to them has happily been conveyed, together with the means of intellectual improvement and the arts of civilised life, the religion of truth. Thus has indirectly the advancement of civilisation tended to promote the visible extension of Christianity. But still more, in a direct manner, in proportion as Christians have, under the improvements of literature, better understood the true spirit of their religion, they have felt with greater force the duty of endeavouring to bring to the knowledge of the truth those nations who have lain enveloped in

the darkness of heathenism. Hence has sprung up that noble zeal for the propagation of Christianity which has produced, and we trust will further produce, in our own times, such abundant fruits; a zeal which, if in some instances it has run into wildness and extravagance, has in others been directed by sound knowledge and firm discretion, and may, we devoutly hope, be destined to burn with holy ardour until the blessed time shall come when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Thus, then, no reflecting person will allow in the slightest degree that the resurrection of letters was prejudicial to the cause of Christianity; but, on the contrary, we have the most solid grounds for the opinion that the sacred cause of Revelation has, in various manners, flourished and prospered more abundantly since that period than it did before. And if, from these views of the subject, we turn to the argument which is to be derived from authority, that is, from the number of the most eminent and enlightened persons whom the world has ever seen who have been firm believers in Christianity,—believers not merely on the principle of acquiescing without enquiry in what is commonly received by others, but believers after establishing their own conviction by regular and laborious investigations of the foundation on which it rested,—we shall find yet further proof that there subsists the most entire harmony between religion and learning. For, not to travel beyond the limits of our own country, when

we find among the firm believers in Christianity, not upon authority of others, but upon their own solid conviction, such men as Newton, and Locke, and Addison, and Boyle,—men without any professional bias, and placed above the influence of vulgar prejudices,—we surely must allow that, whether we would look to the highest distinction in the loftier range of science, or in the investigation of the powers of the human mind, or in that of the truths of natural philosophy, or, lastly, in polished classical taste and the finer departments of literature, instances as strong as the history of the whole world can supply are ranged on the side and in the support of Christianity. It will not be denied that some persons, undoubtedly of high attainments and powerful talents, have been disbelievers in the truth of Revelation. But when we come to enquire into the means they have employed of coming to a right conclusion, and into the manner of their expressing their opinions, we shall find that far less weight is to be given to their authority on such a subject than might at first sight be supposed. Of those who have been most notorious for denying the truth of Revelation, many have indulged in vicious habits and practices so decidedly adverse to all that religion commands, as to make their interests and their wishes wholly incompatible with their being able to form an impartial judgment. With such persons, to believe in an omnipresent God and a future state of retribution, would be the most dreadful and alarming of all evils. Others again, of dis-

tinguished character in other paths of literature, have, in arguing against the Bible, shown the grossest ignorance, and committed the absurdest blunders*, so as to prove most fully that they had not taken the least pains to understand that which they pretended to confute. They have merely hastily taken up some plausible popular objections, and set them off so as to make an impression on the public mind, without instituting any regular enquiry into the ground on which Revelation rests, and the general incontrovertible proofs which may be adduced for its support. Nor have there been wanting persons, amongst the most determined enemies of Revelation, who have manifestly been seduced by the weak vanity of signalising their sagacity in striking out of the path of ordinary belief which the vulgar tread, and by the still more weak as well as wicked disposition of exercising powers of wit and raillery on matters to which feelings of reverence are attached by other men. Thus, if instances such as these be thrown, as they ought to be, out of consideration, the examples will, I apprehend, be very few of persons really eminent for talents and acquirements who have calmly, deliberately, and dispassionately

* The ignorance displayed respecting the contents of the Bible, and the absurd blunders committed in treating of it, by the leader of modern infidel writers, Voltaire, are perfectly notorious. The reader will find them admirably exposed in "Les Lettres de quelques Juifs à M. de Voltaire." See that work, particularly part ii. lett. v. and vi.; part iii. lett. vi.: also Commentaire Extr. ii. viii. ix. x.

investigated the chain of evidence on which Christianity rests, and have in the result become disbelievers in its truth.

In the next place, if, from considering the great preponderance of authority of eminent men in favour of Christianity, we turn to view the many valuable props and assistances which have been supplied to it from every branch of literature, we shall find more full and satisfactory proofs that there indeed subsists a most happy alliance between Revelation and learning; and that if, in some instances, learning misapplied and misused has led to sophistries by which religion has been impugned, it has, in its juster application, and under the direction of sounder heads, supplied the means by which those sophistries have been confuted. For, on what quarter of Revelation, and with what instruments of attack, has the objector made his assault, and not been successfully repelled by those powerful weapons of defence which the lights of modern learning and science have most happily supplied? Has he endeavoured by abstruse metaphysical reasonings to shake our belief in that primary doctrine of all religion, the existence of an all-powerful, all-wise, all-perfect, and omnipresent Creator and Governor of the universe? All the investigations of the natural world which have been made in modern times, the improvements in the anatomy of the human frame, in the knowledge of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and particularly the grand discoveries in the noble science of astronomy, have tended to accumulate the most striking and various proofs, from

the marks of contrivance which abound through the universe, of one great contriving Mind. Has he attempted to perplex our reason by disproving any fixed relation between cause and effect, or by introducing a spirit of general scepticism respecting the certainty of all knowledge; or has he professed to prove that no recorded testimony of miracles performed can ever afford a sufficient ground of assurance of any truth? The improved study of metaphysical science and the weapons of logic have been employed, under the guidance of true wisdom and sound discretion, to confute all these bold paradoxes and perplexing subtleties, and to show that no rational mind can withhold its assent from facts so attested as those which form the groundwork of Christian faith. Has he made it his endeavour, in searching into the volume of Revelation, to distort particular texts from their received meaning by absurd and fanciful interpretations, or to prove that the several books were not written by the persons whose names they bear, or to show that uncertainty has been introduced into the sacred records, at some later periods, by interpolations and alterations? Here the test of accurate and improved criticism, the knowledge of the nicer peculiarities and idioms of the ancient languages, and of the customs of the East, as amply and satisfactorily illustrated by modern travellers, have been applied most successfully to establish the genuineness and authenticity of Holy Writ; to affix the stamp of truth to the received interpretations, and to expose the false. Has he made it his business to magnify such chronological

and historical difficulties as are found in the Bible, and industriously to search out passages which are at variance one with the other? Here the accurate researches which have been made into profane histories, and the lights which have been afforded by the industry and diligence of the learned, have shown a real accordance to exist, where there is apparent discrepancy; and have fully proved that no greater difficulties occur in the Bible, than are unavoidably to be found in all historical records of high antiquity. Has the opponent of Revelation assailed the truth of some of the earlier facts recorded in the book of Genesis, as the descent of the whole human race from one common stock, and the destruction of the world by a common deluge? In the former case, the science of improved physiology has shown, that no variations of colour or countenance, or form, or mental qualities, exist amongst the different individuals of the human race, which may not be well accounted for by the varying influence of climate and soil, and habits and modes of life. In the latter case, the science of geology, so diligently cultivated in modern times, has ascertained that proofs of the earth's having been overspread by a great deluge of waters are found from existing appearances, too clear and decisive to admit of the slightest doubt. In short, to whatever department of modern science and literature we turn, whether to history and antiquities, to criticism and philology, to natural philosophy and physiological research, or to logic and metaphysics, we shall find that all have in some manner, direct or indirect, in some consequence

immediate or remote, been arrayed and drawn forth in support of the great cause of Revelation.*

* The reader will find several examples collected together in Horne's valuable "Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures," (v. i. ch. iii. sect. ii. also Appendix, No. iii.) of the manner in which the accurate researches made into profane histories, and the improvements in the critical knowledge of the ancient languages, of chronology, geography, and of ancient habits and customs, have illustrated and confirmed the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and satisfactorily explained apparent difficulties and discrepancies. In Harmer's well known collections from modern travellers in the East are many happy and beautiful examples of the light which is thrown from this source on the meaning of the sacred writers. For the answers which have been given to the sophistical and subtle reasoning of David Hume and others respecting the evidence of miracles and the general grounds of Christian faith, the mind of the reader will naturally turn to Bishop Douglas's Criterion and Dr. Beattie's Essay on the Truth. With reference to the descent of the whole human race from a common stock, a recent writer of eminence, who shows himself very unfriendly to Revelation in general, Mr. Lawrence, in his Lectures on Physiology, affords his strong testimony to this fact. See also Sumner's Records of Creation, vol. i. p. 344.

In regard to the general deluge, it is the concurring and decided opinion of the most eminent geologists, that the last great change which our earth has undergone has been by the agency of great aqueous currents on its surface. Mr. Greenough, in his Examination of the first Principles of Geology (p. 149—157.), gives it as his decided opinion, that the only satisfactory mode of accounting for many of the present appearances of the earth, as investigated by geologists, is by the supposition of a general deluge. Also, in the Outlines of the Geology of England, by the Rev. W. Coneybeare and W. Phillips, we find the following important testimony to the same effect (Introd. p. lviii.) : —

If, then, universal literature has furnished such powerful aids to Christianity, Christianity has, in return, proved herself to be to literature no feeble or ineffectual ally, but has amply repaid the assistance she has derived by a return of benefits abundantly imparted.

And, in order that we may be convinced of this, we should, in the first place, recollect that, at the period when the lights of civilisation and literature were well nigh extinguished by the irruptions of barbarism, the institutions of religion formed the only barrier by which the valuable remains of the

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" The grand fact of an universal deluge at no very remote period is proved on grounds so decisive and incontrovertible, that, had we never heard of such an event from Scripture or any other authority, geology itself must have called in the assistance of some such catastrophe to explain the phenomena of diluvian action which are universally presented to us, and which are unintelligible without recourse to a deluge exerting its ravages at a period not more ancient than that announced in the book of Genesis."

I am well aware that persons have not been wanting who have endeavoured to take advantage of some of the discoveries of modern geologists, to prove that the world must be of far higher antiquity than is represented in the records of Scripture. But the reader will find some excellent remarks on these objections, and on the manner in which the observed phenomena of geology may be reconciled with the truth of Scripture, in Conybeare and Phillips's Outlines (see Introd. p. 59, 60.). See also, with reference to this subject, Sumner's Records of Creation, vol. i. p. 323, &c. and Professor Buckland's Inaugural Lecture.

literary excellence of antiquity were preserved from the inroads of barbarian violence. The Christian clergy were almost the sole cultivators of any description of learning amidst the gross darkness of ignorance that every where surrounded them; and the precincts of religious houses afforded the only asylum for the works of genius and erudition, of which, otherwise, in the common and wide-wasting ruin, perhaps not a single vestige would have been left. Hence it may be truly said, that we are probably indebted to Christianity for all the models of literary excellence which we derive from the ancients, and which have so essentially contributed to improve the taste, to inform the understandings, and to excite the emulation of the moderns.

But, as a further proof that Christianity has a most powerful tendency to promote the intellectual as well as the moral advancement of mankind, the appeal may with the greatest confidence be made to fact,—to the very remarkable and conclusive fact, that literature has flourished in modern times principally, and almost exclusively, in Christian countries; and this, with the very important addition, that where Christianity has been professed in its greatest purity, there the powers of the human mind have been most developed, and employed with the greatest success in scientific and literary pursuits. View the countries of the East, as Chaldea and Egypt, which have been called the cradle of letters, and from which science first dawned upon the world; view any of the countries of the globe which are strangers

to the knowledge of true religion, and involved in the darkness of heathenism, or given over to gross superstition and religious imposture. You find them in a state of intellectual as well as spiritual abasement. You discover among them no vigour or activity of talent, no spirit of invention, no ardour of research, no desire of literary excellence, and little disposition to cultivate the useful arts which adorn and improve social life. Turn, on the other hand, to Christian lands, to those especially which best deserve the name from the purity of form and doctrine in which Christianity is professed. Here we find—speaking in the general, and with such modifications and qualifications as are necessary in all matters which depend on the operation of mixed human motives, and many causes variously combined—here we find that the greatest vigour of intellectual exertion has ever prevailed; here the thirst of knowledge has been most ardent, the spirit of investigation most active; here has been the greatest capacity to invent, and the greatest desire to improve. Hence it is that these countries have ever been, and are at this moment, the most civilised and improved of any in the world; that in them science has attained to its most towering height, the arts of civilisation have effected most in polishing and adorning life, and the researches of various learning have been pushed to the greatest extent. No doubt, it may be allowed that adventitious and accidental causes have contributed something towards producing these effects: but the

primary cause, the great moving spring, must be sought in the peculiar genius and character of the Christian religion; a religion, of which truth is the foundation, and truth the end; which ever addresses its appeal to the reasoning powers of the human mind, and solicits the most close investigation of the grounds on which it rests; which, as it is intended to increase the happiness of man, so has a direct tendency to dignify, to exalt, and to ennoble his nature; which acts with a force and influence and vigour peculiarly its own, in exciting men to the active employment of their faculties, in giving a spring and impulse to all the energies of their nature, in teaching them that higher range of duties by which they are induced to exert their powers both of mind and body for the general advancement of social happiness, and for the supreme glory of their great Creator.

The reflections which have now been made on the alliance which subsists between Revelation and human learning, and on the support which they have mutually given and received, suggest many inferences of considerable practical importance. They especially recommend to all the duty of endeavouring to maintain, strengthen, and perpetuate a connection, which appears to have been marked out in the designs of the all-wise providence of God, and from which such valuable and extensive benefits have been derived. They call upon the cultivator of human learning never to separate his pursuit from the cause of Revelation, but rather so to employ

and direct it, as to make it subservient to the support of this holy cause. They call upon him who is concerned for the honour of Revelation to endeavour to assist, and give effect to, the tendency which that Revelation has to exalt the intellectual character of mankind, to enlighten their minds with various knowledge, and to stimulate them to the general improvement of their faculties.

Let it then, on the one hand, be the earnest endeavour of all of us, while we exercise with diligence the talents with which we may be severally blessed, in the different departments of human learning, to make our acquirements tend to that which ought to be the great end of all human pursuits—the advancement of true religion for the eternal benefit of ourselves and our fellow-creatures. Instead of being puffed up with pride of understanding by any knowledge to which we may attain; instead of being led by it to indulge the weak vanity of soaring above all vulgar prejudice, and striking out of the path beaten by others, into unknown and devious tracks; instead of feeling a predisposition to doubt what others believe, and for no other reason than because they believe; let us learn that it is the first effect of true wisdom to teach us our own ignorance and weakness; to make us humble, modest, diffident; patient of instruction, and desirous of receiving it; not attempting to be wise above that which is written; willing to bend our reason to the authority of Revelation; and not disposed to reject what that Revelation presses on our belief,

merely on the ground that we find in it some partial difficulties, and that we cannot grasp with our feeble understandings all the designs of Providence respecting it. In particular, with reference to the more peculiar studies of this university, let us beware that the habit of studying the exacter sciences, of conversing with pursuits which deal in strict demonstration, and with truths which can be brought to the test of regular experiment, may not lead us to require similar demonstrative proof in matters of religion, from which, in the nature of things, strict demonstration is excluded; in which our conviction must rest on that high moral probability on which we are obliged, in the common concerns of life, to act at every instant.

On the other hand, let us never fall into the grievous error of separating the cause of Revelation from that of human learning, by decrying, with some enthusiasts of the present day, all human aids in matters of religion, and expecting the necessary knowledge of its sacred truths to be infused into us by immediate inspiration from God. It is the condition wisely annexed by Providence to our present state, that every good, temporal and spiritual, should be acquired by us through the diligent employment of our faculties, and the use of those means which are placed within our reach; and thus must our knowledge of all that concerns our religious faith be attained by diligently perusing Holy Writ, and by applying to those assistances of various human learning by which its meaning is illustrated and

explained. Let those among us especially, who are, or who are destined to be, THE MINISTERS OF GOD'S CHURCH ON EARTH, remember that by the diligent cultivation of their talents in close application to *human learning*, they will lay the best foundation for their professional studies; they will thus be best enabled to prove themselves faithful and useful dispensers of God's holy word, to convince the gainsayer, to bring back the wanderer, to instruct the ignorant, to guard their flocks from danger from within and from without, to give diligence to exhortation and doctrine, and thereby to recommend themselves as faithful servants in the sight of him whose name they bear, and by whose authority they are commissioned.

Acting under these impressions and with these precautions, we shall assist the great purposes designed by him who was "the true Light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Diligent in our Christian calling, anxious to know our duty, and careful to practise it, we shall derive our most valuable knowledge from the fountain of divine truth; and shall consider all human acquirements as subordinate to that which should be the great end of our being—the acquirement of the better wisdom which cometh from above, and which points the way to eternal salvation through Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and only Saviour.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

As an Appendix to the preceding very sound and useful Discourse, the reader may not be disinclined to become acquainted with the sentiments of a distinguished divine of the seventeenth century, upon the SAME SUBJECT. What he is about to peruse is taken from the *Hieraspistes* of BISHOP GAUDEN (1653, 4to.); a work fraught with much learning and research, and singularly characteristic of the excursive and exuberant fancy of its author. That author (as Mr. Todd has, I think, irrefragably proved,) was no less a personage than the writer of the *Eikon Basilike;* and if richness and variety of imagery, with copiousness of diction, constitute eloquent composition, that eloquence may be discovered in the pages of the *Hieraspistes.* The occasional coarseness which disfigures this work, is the fault rather of the age than of the author. In answering the objections to HUMAN LEARNING in the clergy, Bishop Gauden thus remarks:—

"It is certain, that, next to the primitive gifts of *miracles,* the gifts of *humane learning* have stood the Church of Christ in most stead. For ever since the apostles and ministers of Christ, assisted with extraordinary endowments of the Spirit, had by the foolishnesse

of preaching (as by David's improbable weapons against Goliah's compleat armature) vanquished that old idolatrous power of heathenisme, which prevailed in the world, and was long upheld by shews of learning, eloquence, and (in that way) vaine philosophy; the Church of Christ hath, ever since the cessation of those miraculous gifts (which attended onely the first conquests), made use of that very sword of that prostrated gyant, good learning, both to dispatch him, and to defend itself; finding that both in humane and divine encounters, there is none like to that, if managed by a proportionate arm and strength.

"For, hereby the mind, and all intellectuall faculties of men's souls (which are the noblest and divinest) are more easily and fully instructed; more speedily improved in all the riches of wisdome and knowledge; which are part of the glory and image of God on man's nature. By this, which we call good learning, all truths, both humane and divine, naturall, politick, morall, and theologicall, usefull either for speculation or practise, are more clearly extricated, and unfolded out of the depths, darknesse, and ambiguity of words (which are but the shadows of things) by the skill in languages, which are the scabbards and shels, wherein wisdome is shut up. The inscription on Christ's crosse is in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; Luke, xxiii. 38. intimating as the divulging of the Gospel to many tongues and nations; so that the mysterie of Christ crucified is not to be fully and exquisitely understood, without the keys of these three learned and principall languages with which the Church hath flourished. Certainly it is not

easie for unlearned men to consider how great use there is even of grammar, which is the first and roughest file that good learning applyes to polish the minde withall; for much of the true sense even of the Holy Scriptures, as well as of other records, depends upon the true writing or orthography, the exact derivation or etymology, and the regular syntaxis or conjoining of words: yea, that criticall part of literature, which is the finest file or searse of truth (wherein some men's wit and curiosity onely vapour, and soar high, like birds of large feathers and small bodies); yet it is of excellent use, when by men of sober learning it is applyed to the service of religion. Many times much divinity depends on small particles, rightly understood; upon one letter; upon such a mood, or tense, or case, and the like. Many errors are engendred and nourished by false translations, and mistakes of words or letters; many truths are restored and established, by the true meaning of them, asserted upon good grounds, and just observations; which hath been done with great accuratenesse, by men of incomparable excellency in this kinde these last hundred years; equall to, if not for the most part beyond the exactnesse of the ancient fathers or writers. Herein infinite observations of humane writers are happily made, and usefully applyed, as to the propriety of words and phrases used in the sacred originalls of the word of God, so as thereby to attain their genuine and emphatick sense; also for the clearing of many passages and allusions which are in the Scriptures, referring to things naturall and historicall, in the manners and customes of the nations. This once done, all truths are by the methods

and reasoning of logick easily disentangled, and fairly vindicated from the snarlings, sophisms, and fallacies, with which error, ignorance, or calumniating malice seek to obscure or disguise them, or therein to wrap up and cover themselves, darkening wisdome by words without understanding. After this they are by the same art handsomely distributed, and methodically wound up in severall clews and bottomes, according to those various truths which that excellent art hath spun out; that, thus digested, they may again be brought forth unfolded and presented to others in that order and beauty of eloquence which rhetorick teacheth: by which truths have both an edge and lustre set on them, doe most adorn them, and enforce to the quickest prevalencies on men's mindes, and the firmest impressions on their passions and affections; that so their rationall vigour may hold out to men's actions; and extend to the ethicks or morality of civill conversation, which is the politure of men's hearts and hands; the softner and sweetner of violent passions, and rougher manners, to the candor and equity of polity and society. This civility was, and is the preface and forerunner of religion, the great preparative to piety, the confines of Christianity, which never thrives untill barbarity be rooted up, and some learning with morality be sown and planted among men. Nor did Christian religion ever extend its pavilion much further, than the tents of learning and civility had been pitched by the conquests and colonies of the Greeks and Romans." p. 397.

A little before, the author, in his peculiar way, thus pithily observes:—

"I see the devill is never more *knave*, than when hee

would seem to turn *fool*. How willing is he to have all men as ignorant, weak, and unlearned, as these objecters are, that so none might discern his snares, and gins, of which these ignaro's are to be his setters; fain would he have all Christians, yea, and preachers too, such 'silly birds without heart, that they might easily be circumvented by his stratagems, and catched with his devices.'* The better to act those tragedies which he intends against the reformed churches, he would have the windows shut up, and the light shut out; these are the *Fauxes* with dark lanthorns, to blow up all; and the *Judasses*, who are guides to them that are to take Christ with swords and staves! O how fain would some men, that the sun were set, that their glowormes might shine; that the light of the house were extinguished, that so their sparkes might appear, which they have kindled to themselves, in their shining corners, and upon their private hearths.

"Truly this calumny against *good learning* hath as much surprized me and my brethren the ministers of this church, as the accusation of Fimbria did question Scævola; who was impleaded by the other, for not receiving that poynard deeper into his breast, wherewith hee stabbed him, and intended to have dispatched him. The learned and godly ministers in England never thought this would be laid to their charge as a fault, the want of which had been a foul shame, and a just reproach to them; as the enjoyment of it was a great honour and advantage, both to them and to the reformed religion; they little suspected, that among Christians,

* Hosea, vii. 11.

Apollos should be forced to excuse his eloquent and potent demonstrations; or S. Paul his sober and sanctified learning, in which hee excelled, worthy of that famous city and university Tarsus, of which he had the honour to be free, and pleaded it as a priviledge; Acts, xxi. 39. Which learning made him not so mad, as those were who suspected and accused him, that 'much learning had made him mad.' And if humane learning be such old clouts and rotten rags, as these men of most beggerly elements pretend, (and wee confesse it is so, compared to, and destitute of, those soul-saving truths, which are divinely revealed) yet there may be good use of them, if it be but to help the Jeremies (the prophets and ministers of the Lord) out of those dungeons and mire, where otherwayes their enemies would have them ever to be lodged, both sordidly, and shamefully, and obscurely." p. 395.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

LONDON:
Printed by A. & R. Spottiswoode,
New-Street-Square.

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324327

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